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God  
The Teacher  
OF  
Mankind

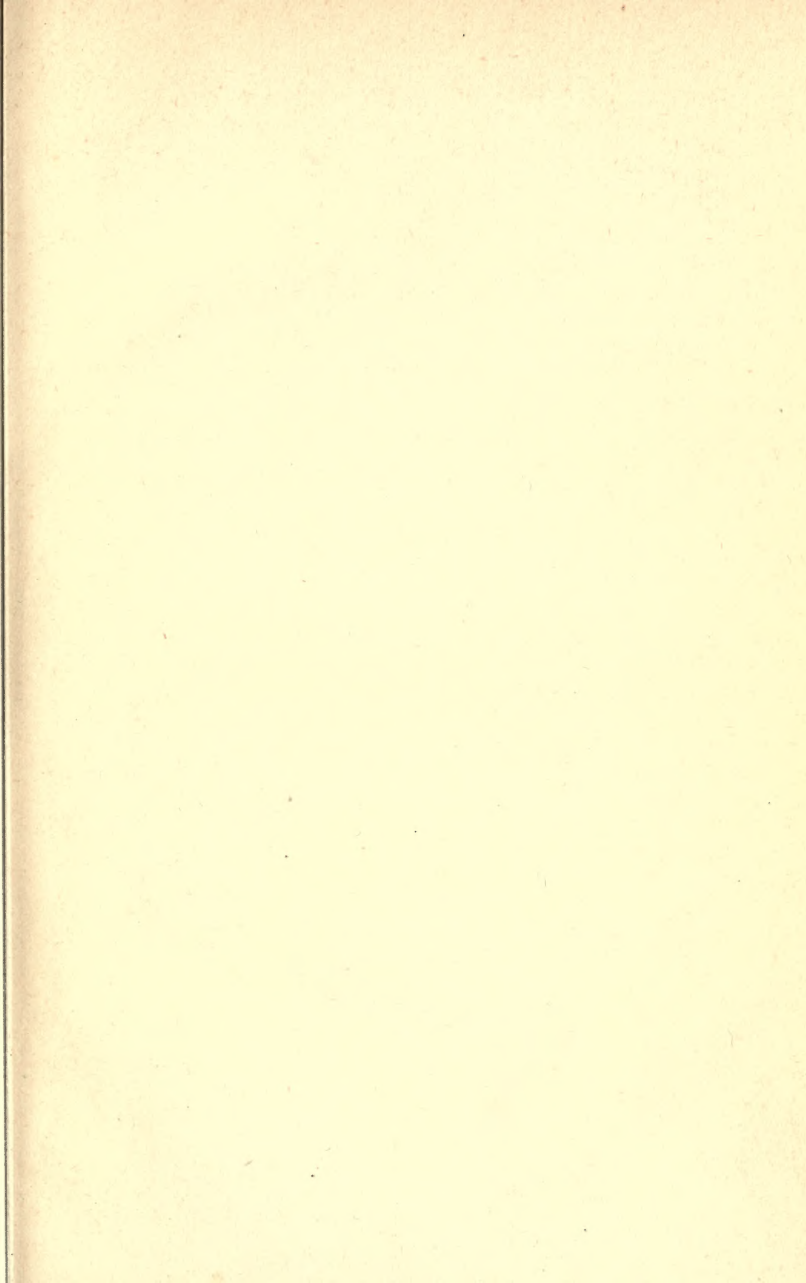
















# GOD THE TEACHER

OF

## MANKIND:

A PLAIN, COMPREHENSIVE EXPLANATION OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

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THE SACRAMENTS OF  
THE HOLY EUCHARIST AND PENANCE.

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BY

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## OBLATION.

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I offer thee this book, O Lord Jesus Christ, Fount of eternal light, in union with that ineffable charity which moved thee, the only begotten of the Father, in the plenitude of the Divinity, to take upon thyself our nature and to become man; I beseech thee to take it into thy divine keeping, that it may glorify thy divine bounty towards us, vile creatures that we are. And since thou, the Almighty Dispenser of all good things, dost vouchsafe to nourish us during our exile, until, beholding thy glory with unveiled countenance, we are transformed into thee, grant, I beseech thee, to all who read these writings with humility, that they may be charmed with the sweetness of thy charity, and inwardly drawn to desire the same, in order that they may advance daily in perfection; so that, elevating their hearts towards thee with burning love, they may be like so many golden censers, whose sweet odors shall abundantly supply all my negligence and ingratitude.

Dear Mother Mary, do thou also pray to thy divine Son for all those who may read this book.





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### THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

DURING the three years and a half in which our Lord Jesus Christ manifested himself as the Saviour and Teacher of mankind, he drew all hearts after him—the hearts of children, the hearts of the just, and even the hearts of sinners. This wondrous power came from the effect of our Lord's appearance upon those around him. A majestic sweetness shone forth in his every look, word, and gesture. He chose for his emblem the lamb, the gentlest of all creatures; and so brightly did this gentleness beam forth from his divine countenance that as soon as the holy Baptist beheld him, he cried out: "Behold the Lamb of God!" A certain nun, having reflected on this lovely sweetness of our Lord, said to St. Teresa: "I wish that I had lived at the time when Jesus Christ lived on earth. What a joy to see our Lord's blessed countenance, to be near him, to witness his miracles, to hear from his lips the words of eternal life, to follow him from place to place, to be able to receive him into our houses, and to assist him in his temporal wants! Surely then would I become a saint." St. Teresa, on hearing this, laughed outright. "What!" said she, "do you not know, dear sister, that the same Jesus Christ is still with us on earth, that he lives quite near us, in our churches, on our altars, in the Holy Eucharist?"

### 1. What is the Holy Eucharist ?

*The Holy Eucharist is the body and blood, the soul and the divinity, of Jesus Christ, under the appearances of bread and wine.*

Indeed, the Holy Eucharist, or the Blessed Sacrament, is the true body and blood, the soul and divinity, of Jesus Christ, who is truly, really and substantially present under the outward appearances of bread and wine. This is a great mystery ; and in order the more to confirm our faith in it, we must consider :

I. How Jesus Christ prepared the minds of the people to believe in the mystery of the Holy Eucharist.

II. How Jesus Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist.

III. Why Jesus Christ hides himself in this great mystery.

IV. How Jesus Christ confirmed his followers in their faith regarding this great mystery.

V. How this faith is preserved and increased.

VI. Why Jesus Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament.

VII. What virtues Jesus teaches us in the Holy Eucharist.

### I. HOW JESUS CHRIST PREPARED THE PEOPLE TO BELIEVE IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

OUR Saviour knew that if he were to teach the Jews and his disciples the new and wonderful doctrine of this mystery without having first prepared them for it, there would be scarcely found one to believe him. When God intends to do something very extraordinary, he generally prepares men for it by revealing to them beforehand, what he is about to do. Thus we know that, when he intended to destroy the world by the deluge, he made the

destruction known through Noah, a hundred years before it took place. Again, when the Son of God had become man, and was about to make himself known as the Redeemer of the world, he sent St. John the Baptist to prepare the people for his coming. Finally, when he intended to destroy Jerusalem, he foretold by the prophets the destruction of that city, and Jesus Christ has also described the signs by which men may know when the end of the world is at hand. God acts thus with men because he does not wish to overwhelm them by his strange and mysterious dealings. Hence, when our divine Saviour was about to tell the people that he intended to give them his flesh and blood as food and drink for their souls, he prepared them for this mysterious doctrine by working an astounding miracle—the feeding of five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes. Those who witnessed this miracle, were so filled with reverence for Jesus Christ, that they wished to take him by force and make him their king. But Jesus, perceiving this, fled from them. They found him again, however, on the following day; and then he took occasion, from the impression the miracle had made on them, to introduce the subject of the heavenly food which he was about to give to the world. “Amen, I say to you; ye seek me, not because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten of the loaves and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to life everlasting, which the Son of Man will give you.” Here our Lord declares that the food he was to give them would confer eternal life. Their curiosity being excited by these words, they desired to know more about this heavenly food and asked what sign he would give them, and whether the food he spoke of

was better than the manna from heaven, which God had given their fathers in the Desert. Before giving any further explanation, our Lord speaks of the absolute necessity of faith in his divine person. "This is the work of God that you *believe* in me as your divine Redeemer. But you have seen me and you believe not. This is the will of my Father that sent me: that every one who seeth the Son, and *believeth* in him, may have life everlasting, and I will raise him up in the last day. Amen, amen, I say unto you, he that believeth in me hath life everlasting." (John xxix., 47.) In ordinary words Our Lord would say: You must believe that I am your Redeemer and your God, and that, therefore, it is in my power to give you such bread as bestows upon you life everlasting. Then having required of them an unwavering faith, he promises to give them a heavenly bread. He had just given them miraculous bread, a kind of bread far superior to ordinary bread; but the bread from heaven, which he was to give, was something far superior to the miraculous bread, and consequently far more than ordinary bread. The Jews thought that he would perhaps give them something like manna, but Jesus assured them that the heavenly bread, which he intended to give, was far superior even to manna. "Your fathers," he said to them, "did eat manna in the desert, and are dead; but he that eats of the bread that I will give, shall live forever."

Now manna was called bread from heaven, the bread of angels. It was better than the miraculous bread, with which Jesus had fed the Jews, and consequently far better than ordinary bread. But Jesus Christ promises to give us a kind of bread superior even to manna. This he calls the true bread from heaven, to show us, that the manna



was but a figure of this heavenly bread. He calls it also the living bread, to show us unmistakably that it is far more than ordinary bread, for ordinary bread is not a living bread. Now what is this bread that Jesus Christ promises to give us? This bread, far superior to ordinary bread, to the miraculous bread, to manna, the bread of the angels, this bread from heaven, this living bread, must indeed be something very extraordinary, something which had never yet been given to man, since, before promising it, before telling us what it is, our Lord insists so earnestly upon the necessity of faith. What then is this extraordinary bread? Our Lord no longer conceals it; He tells us in the strongest, clearest language—"I am the bread of life, I am the living bread, which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give, is my flesh for the life of the world." (John vi., 48, 51, 52.) "The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?'" St. Cyril of Alexandria, who lived in the fifth century, asks here: "O Jew, how can you ask this question? Let me also ask you, How did you go out of Egypt? Tell me how the rod of Moses was turned into a serpent, how was his hand made leprous, and again restored, as it is written? How was water changed into the nature of blood? How did you pass through the midst of the sea, as through a dry plain? How was the bitter water of Merrha changed into sweet by a piece of wood? How was water given you from the bosom of the rocks? How was the manna brought down from heaven for you? How did the Jordan stand still in its bed? Or how, by a mere shout, did the impregnable wall of Jericho fall? And will you not cease to utter that *how*? Therefore it

becomes you to believe in Christ's word and to strive to learn the *manner* of the Eucharist, rather than say inconsiderately, like men drunk with wine, *How can this man give us his flesh to eat?*

"The Jews understood our Lord as inviting them to a barbarous action. They thought it something horrible to order them to eat human flesh and drink human blood. Hence they thought: How can a human body introduce eternal life into us? How can this body which is of the same nature as ours bestow immortality?

"'It is the Spirit that quickeneth,' says our Lord to them; 'The flesh profiteth nothing.' That is to say: there is no absurdity in saying that the flesh is not able to bestow life; the nature of the flesh is such that of itself it cannot vivify in any way. On the contrary, it stands in need of a vivifying power. Now were you to believe that I am your God and Saviour, were you to consider the mystery of the Incarnation, were you to believe that the divinity is united to my humanity in one person, you would also understand that my flesh is food indeed and that my blood is drink indeed. You would understand that he who eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood, abideth in me and I in him, and thus hath everlasting life. It is therefore very foolish on your part to be scandalized at my words. If you think that my flesh cannot infuse life into you, how shall it ascend to heaven? And yet this spectacle shall be placed before your own eyes. What will you say then? When you see my flesh ascend to heaven, which, to all seeming, is contrary to its nature, will you still say that my flesh contains no vivifying power? 'Amen, amen, I say to you, he that believeth in me, hath everlasting life.' You must, then, believe me

to be what I have so often told you. ‘The words which I have spoken to you are spirit and life.’ My flesh is not flesh only, it is spirit also, because it is perfectly united to my divinity, and assumes the entire vivifying power of my Godhead. Although your human body is subjected to death by sin, and forced to yield to corruption, yet if I am in you, by means of my own proper flesh, you shall assuredly rise again. For it is incredible, yea rather, it is impossible, that life should not vivify those in whom it lives. It is by means of my own flesh, that I wish to hide life within you, and to introduce into you, as it were, a certain seed of incorruption which destroys what is corruptible in you. For receiving within yourselves both my human and divine nature, you will become glorified by becoming sharers in that nature which is above all things.” It is thus that St. Cyril confounds the Jews for daring to say, “How can this man give us his flesh?”

In the sixteenth century some apostate Catholics, calling themselves Protestants,—in their pride and ignorance, sought to imitate the Jews in contradicting our Saviour. They said that he spoke only figuratively when he promised, and commanded us to eat his flesh. Now such an assertion is as absurd and ridiculous as it is false and blasphemous. In Hebrew, and in all the Oriental languages, the expression, “to eat one’s flesh,” when taken figuratively, means to backbite, to slander, to persecute,—and nothing else. To say, then, that our Saviour spoke only figuratively, would be to say, that he commands us under pain of eternal damnation, to backbite and to slander him.

When our Lord Jesus Christ had made this extraordinary promise to the Jews, did they really understand him to say,

that he would give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink? They clearly did understand him so, and for this reason asked in astonishment: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" And some of them said: "This is a hard saying, who can hear it?" And even many of his disciples were so shocked at the idea of eating the flesh of Jesus, and drinking his blood, that they went away from him altogether, and never went with him any more. The Jews, then, did not understand our Lord to have spoken figuratively, for had they done so, there was no reason for being shocked at his words. The whole Jewish religion was made up of types and figures, so that if our Lord had spoken figuratively, it would have been nothing new to them. No, the Jews understood him to speak of eating his very flesh and drinking his very blood.

But the question is: Did our Saviour wish the Jews to understand him in this manner? Most certainly he did. Our Lord saw that the Jews understood him to speak of eating his real flesh and drinking his real blood. Instead of contradicting that opinion, he confirmed it again and again, in the strongest and most unmistakable terms. Had his intention been to give them his flesh and blood to eat in a figurative manner only, would he not, and should he not, have corrected the mistake of the Jews then and there? He had come on earth to banish falsehood and error, and to teach the truth. Must he not then have told the truth at that moment?

Jesus Christ gave himself to us as a model; we were to learn from him how to speak the truth with honesty and sincerity. Could he then act as an impostor only to deceive us? Even to think of such a thing would be blasphemous. An impostor usually makes fine promises;



he exaggerates the value of what he promises to give ; but an honest man will rather underrate than exaggerate the value of what he promises, especially if he sees that his friends really believe his words, and that any exaggeration whatever would be productive of great evils. Suppose you promise a friend of yours, to make him a present of a fine house, but you intend to give him only a picture of the house which you have in your room. You see, however, that your friend believes that you intend to give him a real house ; you foresee, moreover, that this misunderstanding of his will be the cause of long and bitter quarrels and law-suits. Are you not bound by every sense of honesty, charity, and justice, to inform him that he has misunderstood you, that you intend to give him only a picture of your house ? Our Lord promises, in the clearest terms, to give us his flesh to eat ; he sees that the Jews, his disciples, and his apostles, understand his words literally. He sees many already take offence and leave him ; he knows that by leaving him, they incur eternal damnation. He sees that in after-times disputes and quarrels will arise among men as to what is the real meaning of his words ; that many will understand them literally, whilst others will take them in another sense. Was it not his most sacred duty to explain beyond doubt the meaning of his words ? If he wished to be understood figuratively, should he not have said : My children, you misunderstand me ; I will not give you my real flesh and blood, but only a figure of my flesh. But instead of speaking thus, and correcting the Jews, he, on the contrary, confirms what he has said. He repeats, at least five times, that he will really give us his flesh to eat. And as our Lord foresaw that there would be many who would refuse to eat his flesh and drink



his blood, he solemnly threatens eternal damnation to all those who refuse. "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you shall not have life in you." Whilst to all who obey him, he promises eternal life. "He that eateth my flesh hath life everlasting." He asserts twice that what he has spoken is a literal statement; for the Greek word "*alethos*," means true and literal. "For my flesh is meat indeed—*i.e.* it can be eaten indeed: and my blood is drink indeed"—*i.e.* it can be drunk in very deed.

Jesus Christ at first said that he would give us bread from heaven, a living bread, but now, to take away every shadow of doubt, he tells us, that the bread, which he will give, is his flesh; while, to convince us that he really intends to give us his flesh, he says: "He that eateth me, shall live by me." And, to confirm all this and take away every shadow of doubt and of excuse, he swears in the most solemn manner, at least four times, that he will give us his real flesh and blood, that he will give us himself to be our food. "Amen, amen I say unto you, etc., etc." Now in Hebrew, "*amen*," when used thus, is equivalent to an oath. Again Jesus swears, by his mission and by his life, that he will give us himself to be our food. "As the living Father hath sent me, and as I live by the Father, he that eateth me, etc." It is just as if Jesus had said: "I declare to you, as true as the living God has sent me, and as true as I live by the Father, he that eateth me, etc." Now what stronger, what clearer language could our Lord have used, to convince us, that he really intended to give us his flesh and his blood? It is impossible to furnish stronger proofs, for any single truth in the whole Christian religion. No wonder that our blessed Lord was filled with sadness when he saw, in spite

of all that he had said and done, there would still be many who would be lost for not believing in his words. "What!" said he, turning to the unbelieving Jews, "does this scandalize you? You do not believe that I can give you my flesh to eat? What then will you say when you see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?" Jesus Christ appeals to the mystery of his ascension, to show us that it is just as easy for him to give us his sacred body to be our food, as it is for him to ascend with that body to the right hand of God in heaven. He appeals to his ascension, to convince us that just as certain as his body is now in heaven, so certain is it that his body is now also in the Blessed Eucharist.

Whenever Jesus Christ had spoken figuratively in public, he always explained himself in private to his disciples. But here he speaks in private as in public, to show us, that he does not speak figuratively, that he wishes to be understood literally. When he saw that many, even of his own disciples, left him because they would not believe his words, he turned to the twelve, to his chosen, beloved apostles, and instead of giving them any new explanation, he asked them: "Will you also go away?" As if saying: I have told you the truth, I cannot change what I have said; for it is the truth. If you will not believe me, you also may go.

Indeed, the Christian, who after so many clear unanswerable proofs sees not the truth, must in very deed be wilfully blind. He is like the owl, that closes its eyes at mid-day, and flaps its wings and says: The sun does not shine, for I do not see it. If Jesus Christ left us only a figure of his body, if he left us, after all, only a piece of bread, why did he use so many precautionary measures, in order to persuade us? Why did he insist so much

upon the necessity of faith? For faith is to believe in something that we do not see. If Jesus Christ left us only a piece of bread, why did he tell us that it is far superior even to manna? Why did he tell us in so many formal and affirmative propositions that he would really give us his flesh to eat? If he intended only to give us a piece of bread, what need was there to appeal to the great miracle of his ascension? If he intended to give us his body figuratively, why did he suffer the Jews and his own disciples, even, to go away, without modifying a single word of his oft-repeated assertion, that he would really give us his flesh to eat? Jesus, seeing that the Jews and many of his disciples would not believe that he was to give them his flesh and blood as food for their souls, suffered them to go away offended, and when they were gone, he said to the twelve: "Will ye also go away?" Then Simon Peter answered in the name of all: "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we have believed and have known that thou art the Christ the Son of God." (V. 68, 70.)

Remark the noble simplicity of faith of the apostles. They believe the words of their Master without the least hesitation; they receive his words in that sense in which the others had refused to receive them. They accept them in their obvious meaning, as a promise that he would give them his *real flesh* to eat and his *real blood* to drink; they believe with a full faith, simply because he is "the Christ, the Son of God," too good to deceive and too wise to be deceived: too faithful to make vain promises, and too powerful to find any difficulty in fulfilling them. It was from this time forward that the disciples were constantly expecting that Jesus Christ would fulfil his promise.

## II. HOW JESUS CHRIST INSTITUTED THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

### **2. Who first changed bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ ?**

*Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, at the Last Supper.*

The apostles always remembered the promise which Jesus had made to give them his most holy flesh and blood. But the promise was not fulfilled immediately.

In Jerusalem there is a hill called Mount Sion. On this hill, near the tomb in which King David was buried, was a house which contained a large dining-room. If you had entered that room the evening before Jesus died on the cross, you would have seen him sitting at a table with his twelve apostles. What a sight ! To behold the Creator in the midst of his creatures, whom he had made out of the dust of the earth ! It was a solemn moment, for he was then about to perform the greatest miracle that ever had been, or ever will be performed. He was going to give himself away, by changing bread into his body, and wine into his blood, to be the food of his creatures. To give us heaven and earth, his angels, and his Blessed Mother to watch over us, was surely gift enough. It would seem almost too good, to do what St. Augustine has well called the folly of love,—to give us himself. But the love of Jesus for us was boundless, so that nothing seemed to him too good for us.

### **3. Why can Jesus Christ change bread and wine into his body and blood ?**

*Because, as God, he can do all things.*

It happened once in the Netherlands, that two ladies, a Catholic and a Protestant, were disputing on the subject of the real presence. The Protestant asserted that the



real presence was impossible. The Catholic asked her: "Have you Protestants any creed in your religion?" "Oh, to be sure," said the Protestant; and she began to recite: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." "Stop," said the other; "that is enough. You say that you believe in an all-powerful God: why then do you not believe that he can change bread into his body and wine into his blood? Is that difficult for him who is Almighty?" The Protestant had nothing to answer. Indeed, it is as easy for Almighty God to change bread into his body, and wine into his blood, as it was for him to create heaven and earth out of nothing.

#### **4. How did Jesus Christ change bread into his body, and wine into his blood?**

*"Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and blessed and broke, and gave to his disciples, and said: Take ye and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. And in like manner, taking the chalice, he gave thanks, and gave to them, saying: Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for you, and for many, unto remission of sins. Do this for a commemoration of me." (Matt. xxvi., 26-28; Luke xxii., 19, 20; Mark xiv., 22-24.)*

As to these words we must consider especially the *Speaker*. It was God himself. It was the same God who created heaven and earth out of nothing; who, in the beginning, said: "Let light be made," and in an instant the sun, the moon and the stars appeared in the heavens; the same God who once destroyed the whole world, with the exception of eight persons, by water; who destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by fire from heaven; who, by his servant Moses, wrought so many miracles in the sight of



Pharaoh, and conducted the Israelites out of Egypt, making a dry path for them through the Red Sea; it was the same God, Jesus Christ, who changed water into wine; who gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, and life to the dead; Jesus Christ, who ascended into heaven, and who, at the end of the world, will come again with great majesty in the clouds of heaven, to judge the living and the dead. He it was, the great Almighty God, who took bread into his most sacred hands, blessed and gave to his disciples, saying: "*Take ye and eat: for this is my body.*" He it was who, in the same manner, took the chalice, blessed and gave to the disciples, saying: "Drink ye all of it, for this is my blood."

**5. What became of the bread, when Jesus said: "This is my body;" and of the wine, when he said: "This is my blood"?**

*The bread was changed into the body, and the wine into the blood of Christ.*

The word of God is life-giving and all-powerful. When God speaks, the thing is done, and done instantly. As he made the sun, the moon and the stars merely by saying: "Let light be made," so also, at the Last Supper, by his word alone, he instantaneously changed bread into his body, and wine into his blood.

"Eat and drink," said Jesus then to his apostles; it is all your own; do not think of what your senses perceive; it is to your faith, not to your senses, that I say, "This is my body." Remember that it is I who have said this: I, and no other:—only the Son of God, by whom everything was made, could speak thus: for to me nothing is impossible. The apostles believed simply: they believed as strongly as

our Saviour had spoken, and their submission was as great as the authority and power which he had displayed. There was in their faith that same simplicity which was contained in the words of Jesus : " This is my body, this is my blood." It is then really his body under the appearance of bread, and his blood under the appearance of wine. So said the apostles. Then did they all receive our Lord's body, and drank of the most precious blood of Jesus Christ.

It was in the following manner in which a pious painter, named Leonardo, showed to a Lutheran and a Calvinist that the Catholics were right in their belief concerning the Holy Eucharist. He, one day, met in an inn two men, one of whom was a Lutheran and the other a Calvinist. They were ridiculing the Catholic doctrine about the Blessed Sacrament. The Calvinist pretended that these words, " This is my body," only meant that the bread *signifies* the body of Christ; the Lutheran, on the other hand, asserted that this was not true, but that they meant that bread and wine, at the moment of their reception, became, by the faith of the recipient, the body and blood of Christ. While this dispute was going on, Leonardo took a piece of paper and drew the image of our Lord Jesus Christ, with Luther on the right hand and Calvin on the left. Under the image of our Saviour he wrote the words : " This is my body." Under the figure of Calvin he wrote : " This *signifies* my body;" and under that of Luther : " This becomes my body at the moment in which you eat it." Then handing the paper to the two disputants, he said : " Which of these three is right, our Saviour, or Calvin, or Luther?" They were struck with the force of the argument, and ceased to scoff at the Catholic doctrine.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has said : “ I am the *truth* : ’ *i. e.* all words that I speak are true. Now he took bread into his hands and said, “ This is my body ; ” it is then really his body under the appearance of bread. He took a cup of wine and said, “ This is my blood ; ” it is then really his blood under the appearance of wine which he presented to his apostles. He who spoke in this manner was the Creator of heaven and earth, with whom to speak and to act are one.

When God works miracles for the relief of bodily necessities, men believe. Now when his immense love for our souls moves him to change bread and wine into his body and blood for the relief of our spiritual necessities, they refuse to believe. What blindness of the mind ! What perverseness of the heart ! Had Christ said, “ This is not my body, this is not my blood,” every one would say that neither his body nor his blood is present in the sacrament, because these words, taken in the natural, literal sense, could convey no doubt to the mind. But Jesus Christ has said— “ This *is* my body, this *is* my blood : ” why then should not those words have equal force in proving that his body and blood are truly and really present in the Blessed Sacrament ?

“ Since Christ himself,” writes St. Cyril of Jerusalem, in the fourth century, “ has said ‘ *This is my body*, ’ who then shall dare to doubt of it ? And since he says, ‘ *This is my blood*, ’ who will dare to say it is not his blood ? He once changed water into wine ; and does he not deserve to be believed, when he has changed wine into his blood ? With a certainty excluding all manner of doubt, we take the body and blood of Christ ; for under the appearance of bread his body is given, and his blood under the appearance of wine.”

“Let us, therefore,” says St. John Chrysostom, “believe God always ; let us never contradict him, though what he says appears above our reason ; for his word cannot deceive us, but our senses may easily be deceived. As, therefore, he said, This is my body, let us believe it without the least hesitation.”

**6. What do we call the words, “This is my body,” “This is my blood” ?**

*They are called “the words of consecration.”*

The words “This is my body,” “This is my blood,” are the very words which Jesus Christ spoke over the bread and wine at the Last Supper, and by which he consecrated, that is, changed bread and wine into his body and blood. These words, therefore, are called the words of “consecration.”

**7. What do we call the change of the bread into the body, and of the wine into the blood, of Christ ?**

*This change is called TRANSUBSTANTIATION ; which means a real change of the substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ, and of the substance of the wine into the substance of his blood.*

What is substance ? By our senses we know nothing of substance. Its existence is perceived only by the mind. The color, form, taste, etc., of a thing may be changed, yet the substance remains. Ice, for instance, can be changed into water ; and water into ice or into invisible vapor. But how do we know that ice, water, and vapor are the same substance ? We know this, not by our senses, but only by our mind. What then is this indestructible substance, that mysterious thing so real, yet so fleeting, so inert, yet so active ? It is that which makes a thing what it really is.



Although no natural power can destroy the substance of a thing, yet the power of God which has produced the substances of all things out of nothing can change the substance of one thing into the substance of another. By the almighty power of God, therefore, the substance of bread can be changed into the substance of the body of Christ, and the substance of wine into the substance of the blood of Christ. This change takes place by the words of consecration at Mass, and is called "Transubstantiation." Hence St. Paul says: "The Chalice of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of *Christ*? And the bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of the Lord?" (1 Cor. x., 16.) Here he expressly says that in the Holy Eucharist we partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ; consequently, that the substance of bread and wine has been changed into the body and blood of Christ. And still further on he says, in the same epistle to the Corinthians: "Whosoever shall eat this bread, or drink the chalice of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Nay, he goes further and says: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord." (1 Cor. xi., 29.) How could the apostle declare that any one who received holy communion unworthily would eat and drink eternal damnation, if such a one did not really receive our Lord? Would it not be absurd to say that a man would incur eternal damnation by merely eating a piece of bread, or drinking a few drops of wine? But because the apostle, taught by Jesus Christ himself, knew that he who receives holy communion receives our Lord himself, he declared that to receive it



unworthily was to be guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and consequently to deserve hell-fire.

Moreover, all the Fathers of the Church teach the same doctrine as St. Paul. St. Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, who lived in the first century, wrote as follows to the faithful of Smyrna: "Because the heretics refuse to acknowledge the Holy Eucharist to be the same flesh which suffered for our sins and was raised again to life by God the Father, they die a miserable death and perish without hope." Tertullian says: "Our flesh is nourished with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, in order that our souls may be filled with God himself." "Who," asks St. John Chrysostom, (De Resurrect. carnis c. viii.) "will give us of his flesh that we may be filled." (Job xxxi., 31.) This, Christ has done, allowing himself not only to be seen, but to be touched too, and to be eaten, to be united to us, thus gratifying all our wishes. Parents often give their children to others to be nursed: this I do not do, says Christ,—*"I nourish you with my flesh and place myself before you. I was willing to become your brother; for your sake I took flesh and blood: and again I deliver to you that flesh and blood by which I became so nearly related to you."* In like manner speak all the Fathers of the Church that have written upon this subject.

It has, therefore, always been an article of Catholic belief, that in the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist, are truly and really contained the body of Christ, which was delivered for us, and his blood which was shed for the remission of sins; the substance of the bread and wine being, by the power of God, changed into the substance of his blessed body and blood, and the species, or appearances of bread and wine, by the power of the same God,

remaining as they were. This change has been properly called Transubstantiation.

“As Christ our Redeemer,” says the Council of Trent, “declared that to be truly his own body, which he offered under the species of bread; therefore has it always been firmly believed by the Church of God, and this holy synod again declares it, that: by the consecration of the bread and wine, a change is made of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood; which change has been aptly and properly called by the Holy Catholic Church, Transubstantiation.” (Sess. xiii. c. iv.) Hence—“If any one shall deny that, in the sacrament of the most Holy Eucharist, there is contained truly, really, and substantially, the body and blood together with the soul and divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ, and therefore the whole Christ; but shall say that he is only therein in sign, or figure, or virtue, let him be anathema.”

**8. What did Christ mean when he said to the apostles, “Do this for a Commemoration of me?”**

*In these words he empowered and commanded the apostles, and, through them, the Catholic bishops and priests, to change bread and wine into his body and blood.*

An eternity had passed, and the most holy flesh and blood of God had never yet been given to any creature. The apostles were the first to whom this blessing of blessings was given. It was the will of Jesus that from that moment forward, all his poor creatures should everywhere freely eat his flesh and drink his blood to make them holy before God. For the good of his creatures, he

wished his body and blood to be scattered over the earth, like the dew of heaven. But Jesus knew that in about forty days he would be no longer present in the flesh on earth, to give away with his own hands his sacred body and blood. For this reason he wished to leave others on earth to perform this office for him. So he said to his apostles and priests—"Do this in remembrance of me;" that is to say, to you I give the power to do what I have done—to change bread and wine into my flesh and blood, and to give it to my people. The word of Jesus will never pass away. The sun will shine on the earth until the last day of this world. So the body and blood of Jesus Christ will be given by the priests of Jesus Christ to his people, to be the light and strength and joy of their souls to the end of the world.

Only priests, then, are the ministers of the consecration of the Holy Eucharist. It was only to the apostles and their lawful successors that Christ said: "Do this in commemoration of me." Although these words apply indirectly to all the faithful, and are a precept commanding them to communicate and join in the sacrifice with the priest, yet, primarily and fully, they apply only to those who were first addressed. Unless they be so limited, laymen and even women, would be bound to celebrate, which no one supposes. The Catholic Church has, from the beginning, taught that to the apostles and their successors in the priesthood, the power was delivered of consecrating, offering, and administering the body and blood of Christ. (Council of Trent, sess. xxiii., c. 1.) Any priest whether heretical, schismatical, excommunicated, or suspended, consecrates validly, because the priestly character, or power of orders, cannot be lost.

The Eucharist as a sacrament, from its nature, admits of being given validly by any person. In the earliest ages the deacon used to administer both kinds, and later on, the chalice only ; but according to the present discipline of the Church, the dispensation of the Holy Eucharist is, except in cases of necessity, strictly confined to the priest. (See vol. *Grace and the Sacraments*, p. 342 to 349.)

### **9. When do the bishops and priests exercise this power ?**

*When at Mass they pronounce over the bread and wine the words of consecration.*

Let us turn for a moment to the Catholic altar. The holy sacrifice of the Mass is being offered up. The bell has given the signal that the most solemn and awful moment of consecration is at hand. As yet there is only bread in the hands of the priest, and wine in the chalice before him. To worship these lifeless elements would be the grossest idolatry. But suddenly, amid the breathless silence of the multitude, the priest performs the act of consecration : that is, he performs the same act which Jesus Christ performed at the Last Supper. He takes the blessed bread, called the host, in his hands, and lifting up his eyes to heaven, he repeats the words of consecration : "This is my body," which Jesus Christ spoke over the bread. After this he pronounces the words of consecration over the wine in the chalice, saying : "This is my blood ;" and that which was bread and wine, is bread and wine no longer, but the true body and blood of our Lord himself. In a hundred thousand Masses that may be said throughout the extent of the whole Church in the space of one hour, God works this same miracle at the moment in which the priest pronounces the words of consecration.



**10. Are bread and wine still on the altar after the consecration?**

*No; after the consecration Christ is present on the altar, whole and entire, as well under the appearance of bread, as under the appearance of wine.*

The moment the priest has pronounced the words of consecration over the bread and wine, that very instant Jesus Christ is present as truly as he is in heaven, with his body and soul, his humanity and divinity. The body of Christ, in this holy sacrament, is not separated from his blood, nor is his blood from his body, nor is either of them disjoined from his soul and divinity; but the whole living Christ is entirely contained under each species, so that, whoever receives under one kind, becomes truly partaker of the whole sacrament: He is not deprived either of the body or the blood of Christ. "For at all times," says the Council of Trent, "the faith has been in the Church of God that, immediately after consecration, the true body of our Lord and his true blood, together with his soul and divinity, are present under the species of bread and wine; but the body indeed under the species of bread, and the blood under the species of wine, by virtue of the words of consecration: moreover, that the body itself *is* under the species of bread, and the blood under the species of wine, and the soul under each, by virtue of that natural connection and concomitance, by which the body and soul of our Lord,—who, being now risen from the dead, can die no more,—are naturally joined together; the divinity, furthermore, is there, on account of its admirable hypostatic union with the body and soul. Wherefore, it is most true that as much is contained under either species, as under both; for Christ, whole and entire, exists under the species,



of bread, and under each particle of that species: and entire under the species of wine, and under its separate parts." (Sess. xiii. ciii.)

Now Christ is not present in this sacrament, according to his natural way of existence; that is, as bodies naturally exist, but in a manner proper to the character of his exalted and glorified body. His presence, then, is real and substantial, sacramental and ineffable, not exposed to the external senses, nor obnoxious to corporal contingencies. Hence the Council of Trent says: "The holy synod openly and plainly professes, that in the holy sacrament of the Eucharist, after the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, is truly, really, and substantially contained under the species of those sensible objects. There is nothing unreasonable in holding that our Saviour, according to his natural manner of existence, should always be seated in heaven, at the right hand of the Father; and that, nevertheless, he should be present with us, in other places, sacramentally in his own substance, in that way of existence, which, though in words we can hardly express it, the mind, illumined by faith, can still conceive to be possible to God, and which we are bound most firmly to believe. For so all our ancestors in the true Church of Christ who have written concerning this most holy sacrament, have most openly professed." (Sess. xiii. ci.)

### **11. What do we mean by the species or appearances of bread and wine?**

*We mean that the shape, taste, smell, and color of the bread and wine remain as they were before the consecration.*

After consecration nothing remains of the bread and wine except the sensible qualities or appearances. If, for instance, the bread is round, its roundness remains after the consecration; if it is white, its whiteness remains; if it has a certain taste or quality, that taste or quality continues; and so with the wine: the particular taste, color, and every other sensible quality are just the same after the consecration as they were before. In a word, whatever is capable of being perceived by the senses remains, but the *substance*, which is perceived by the understanding alone, and not by the senses, is changed.

**12. How long does Christ remain present under the species?**

*He remains as long as the species last.*

In instituting the Holy Eucharist, Jesus Christ has redeemed his promise of giving to the world his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. He thereby fulfilled the promise he made to his apostles: "I will not leave you orphans." (John xiv., 18.) I shall indeed withdraw from you my visible presence by ascending into heaven, but I will stay with you to the end of the world, in the Blessed Sacrament, under the appearances of bread and wine. As Christ, then, has attached his presence among us to the appearances of bread and wine, it is evident that he ceases to be present as soon as those appearances cease to exist.

Now let us see what an unfathomable abyss of astounding miracles the Holy Eucharist is. The first of these prodigies is, that as soon as the priest has pronounced the words of consecration over the host and the wine, the real body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are present upon the altar. His body is present under the appearance of bread, and his blood under the appearance of wine.

The second miracle is, that after the words of consecration there remains neither bread nor wine, though the contrary appears to our senses. When Jacob wished to obtain of his father Isaac the blessing which was designed for Esau, he covered his hands with the skin of a kid that he might the better resemble his brother. "It is indeed the voice of Jacob," said the holy old patriarch, "but the hands are those of Esau." (Gen. xxvii., 22.) The same happens here—that which we touch with our hands, that which is exposed to our senses, appears to be bread and wine; but the voice and the word of faith assure us of the contrary, and faith must supply the defects of our weak senses.

After all, we should not be so much astonished at this; for is it not far more wonderful that God should have become man without ceasing to be God, than that bread, ceasing to be bread, should be changed into flesh? The same divine power whereby the Son of God became man, here changes bread and wine into his body and blood.

The third prodigy that happens in this change is not brought about as in natural things, wherein, when one thing is changed into another, there always remains something of the thing that is changed. Thus, for instance, you can make the form of a lion out of a piece of wax or clay, but the wax or clay remains. But here, after the consecration, there remains in the host nothing of the substance of bread, or in the chalice, of the substance of wine, but the whole substance of bread is changed into the body of Jesus Christ, and the whole substance of wine into his blood. The Church properly calls this entire change—transubstantiation—*i. e.*, the changing of one substance into another.

There remains, therefore, in the Blessed Sacrament nothing of the substance of bread and wine; there remain, only the color, smell, taste, and other accidents, and these are called the *sacramental species*.

The fourth miracle that takes place in the Blessed Sacrament is, that the sacramental species or appearances remain without subject or substance. It is the property of such accidents to be inseparably attached to their substance. It is certain, for instance, that whiteness cannot subsist without being attached to some substance; and the same is to be said of taste and smell. But here, according to an order altogether above the order of nature, the accidents of bread and wine are miraculously sustained, without being united to anything, because nothing of the substance of bread and wine is any longer present to sustain them; and the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which take the place of bread and wine, cannot be the subject of these accidents, *i. e.*, of the color, taste and smell, of the bread and wine. As the manna, which was the figure of this most wonderful sacrament, had the taste of all sorts of things, and yet was none of those things of which it had the taste, so this heavenly manna has the color, taste, and smell of bread and wine, yet is neither the one nor the other; so that, by a continued miracle, God sustains these accidents by themselves.

The fifth prodigy is, that not only the body of Jesus Christ is under the appearance of bread and wine, but that Jesus Christ, true God and true man, is entire there, such as he is in heaven. Hence the blood of Jesus Christ, his sacred soul and his divinity, are conjointly with his body in the host under the species of bread; and his body, his soul, and his divinity are also conjointly



with his blood in the chalice under the appearance of wine. But as theologians observe, all these things are not in the Eucharist after the same manner. For some are there by virtue of the words of consecration, and others by way of concomitance. As the words of consecration produce what they signify, Christ's body is in the host by the words "This is my body," and Christ's blood in the chalice by the words "This is my blood." Now where Christ's body is, there is, by way of concomitance, his blood with his soul and divinity; and where Christ's blood is, there is also, by way of concomitance, his body with his soul and divinity.

In order the better to understand this, theologians say that, had St. Peter or any other of the apostles consecrated during the three days that our Lord remained in the Sepulchre, the soul of Jesus Christ would not have been in the host, because his soul was then in Limbo, and was not united with his body; so that there would have been in the host only the dead body of our Lord, such as it was in the Sepulchre, united, however, to the divinity from which it was always inseparable.

In like manner, when Jesus Christ himself consecrated at his Last Supper, he was in the Eucharist true God and true man, but passible and mortal as he was at that time. Since his resurrection from the dead, however, he is in the Blessed Sacrament such as he now is in heaven—glorious, impassible, immortal.

The sixth prodigy wrought in the Blessed Sacrament is, that Jesus Christ is not only whole and entire in each host, whole and entire in the chalice, but he is also whole and entire in each particle of the host as he is whole and entire in the least species of wine. This is a truth which we



read in the Gospel. At the Last Supper Jesus Christ did not consecrate separately each piece of bread which he gave to his apostles ; he only consecrated at once such a quantity of bread as was necessary to serve as communion to all of them after it was divided. The Gospel, speaking of the consecration of the chalice, expressly observes that Jesus Christ gave it to his apostles, saying to them : " Take and divide it amongst you," (Luke xxii., 17,) so that every apostle receiving a portion of the consecrated bread and wine, received our Lord whole and entire under each species.

**13. When the priest divides the Sacred Host, does he also divide the body of Christ ?**

*No ; he divides only the species or appearances ; for, as Christ is living, he cannot be divided.*

Another great miracle is, that when the priest breaks the host or divides the chalice, it is not Christ who is broken or divided. He always remains whole and entire in each part how little soever it may be ; it is only the species or appearances of bread and wine which is broken or divided.

This is what the Church teaches us in the hymn of the Blessed Sacrament : " He who receives the body of Christ does not bruise it, does not break it, does not divide it ; he receives it whole and entire, he makes no division of it ; makes only a separation of the signs and accidents." " O illusion of the senses," exclaims St. Jerome ; " the accidents with which thou appearest to our senses are broken, but thou, O Lord, remainest whole and entire. Thou remainest always whole and entire, without any division, without any corruption, even in the least particle. (4 Apud Euseb.)

**14. What do we call Jesus Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine ?**

*This real presence is called the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Sacred Host, the Viaticum, the Bread of Life, the Bread of Heaven.*

After the Son of God had become man, he received different names. He was called Jesus Christ ; the Desired of all nations ; the Expectation and Glory of Israël ; the Blessed Fruit of Mary ; the Lamb of God ; the Good Shepherd ; the Spouse of the Church ; the good Samaritan ; the Friend of Sinners ; the Light of the World ; the Eternal Judge, etc. In like manner, different names are given to Jesus Christ hidden under the appearances of bread and wine. He is called the Holy Eucharist, the Blessed Sacrament, etc.

**15. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearance of bread and wine called “Eucharist” ?**

*Because eucharist means “good grace,” and contains Christ, our Lord, the source of all graces.*

The word “eucharist” is a Greek word, which means grace. Jesus Christ is called Eucharist, because he is a special grace and gift of God. Of all the gifts and graces bestowed upon us by God, there is none more special than that conferred upon us in the Holy Eucharist. Though infinite in power, and wisdom, and love, God could devise no greater gift, nor confer on us a more special grace and gift ; for though he should bestow on us a thousand worlds, the gift would not be so rich as that of giving himself to us, even once only in the Blessed Sacrament. The Blessed Eucharist is the greatest of all graces ; for it contains not only particular graces, as the other sacraments contain, but

it contains Jesus Christ himself, the source of all graces and the fountain of all gifts.

**16. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearance of bread and wine called "Blessed," or, "Most Holy Sacrament" ?**

*Because the Holy Eucharist contains Jesus Christ, the Author of all the sacraments, and of all holiness.*

Jesus Christ hidden in the Blessed Eucharist is called a sacrament, because his real presence possesses all that is necessary for a sacrament : namely, *an outward sign, an inward grace, and the institution of Jesus Christ.* The appearances of bread and wine, which remain after consecration and under which our blessed Saviour is received into our souls, are the sensible sign of this sacrament. The body and blood of Jesus Christ are the inward grace contained in this sacrament ; and the institution of this sacrament by Jesus Christ took place at the Last Supper. (Luke xxii., 19.) Wheaten bread, and wine made of the grape, are alone the proper matter of this sacrament. The words of consecration "This is my body," and "This is my blood" are the form, as is quite clear from the accounts of the institution, given by the three evangelists St. Matthew St. Mark, and St. Luke, as well as by St. Paul. According to these accounts, our Lord Jesus Christ determined the matter and form of the Holy Eucharist as well as the manner of consecration which is literally observed by the priest in the celebration of the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

We should notice also, that the Church prescribes the admixture of a little water with the wine : 1, To represent the water and blood which flowed from the side of our Lord ; 2, To represent the effect of the sacrament—the

union of the faithful with Christ,—for water, in the figurative language of Holy Writ, signifies the people; 3, To signify the union of the divine and the human nature of Jesus Christ.

The writings of the earliest Fathers and the Liturgies show the antiquity of this practice. Although, strictly speaking, it is not necessary to the validity of the sacrament nor of divine precept.

Although every sacrament may be called blessed or holy, because it is a blessed means by which the grace of God is bestowed upon our souls, yet none of the sacraments is so holy,—so blessed, as the Holy Eucharist; for, while the other sacraments give only particular graces, this sacrament contains Jesus Christ himself, the author of all the sacraments and the source of all graces.

Again, the other sacraments tend towards this sacrament as their end: baptism, confirmation, and penance more or less directly prepare the soul for the reception of the Holy Eucharist; extreme unction removes whatever may hinder its effects on the soul of the dying person; matrimony signifies the special grace of union between Christ and his Church; holy orders confer the power by which it is consecrated. Other sacraments exist only during the act of administration while the matter and form are being applied; this sacrament exists from the time of the consecration of the matter, and continues as long as the species of bread and wine last. In other sacraments the substance of the matter remains the same, while in this sacrament it is changed.

The Blessed Sacrament consists of two symbols—the body of Christ under the appearance of bread, and the blood of Christ under the appearance of wine; and yet the



sacrament is one, because the two symbols have one meaning, namely, the perfect nourishment and refreshment of the soul; just as bread and wine, meat and drink, signify the perfect refreshment of the body.

This spiritual nourishment is the *grace* which the Holy Eucharist, as a sacrament, signifies and effects. But, besides this, it has other meanings. As to the past, it is the memorial of the passion and death of Jesus Christ. It is the body broken, and the blood shed, set before us: "As often," says St. Paul, "as ye shall eat this bread, and drink the chalice, ye shall show the death of the Lord till he come." (1 Cor. xi., 26.) As to the present, this sacrament symbolizes the Church's unity. "We being many, are one bread, one body, all that partake of one bread." (1 Cor. x., 17.) Hence the Catechism of the Council of Trent says: "The bread made up of many grains, and the wine pressed out from many clusters of the grape, declare that we, though many, are most closely bound together by the bond of this divine mystery, and made, as it were, one body." As a pledge for the future, it promises and prefigures the union with God in the beatific vision.

**17. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine called the "Sacrament of the Altar"?**

*Because he is offered and preserved on the altar.*

When Jesus Christ lived on earth he was called the Nazarene, because he lived in Nazareth. So, in like manner, he is called "the Sacrament of the Altar," because it is on the altar that he, by the words of consecration at Mass, changes bread and wine into his body and blood, stays in the tabernacle, to be worshipped, and received by us in holy communion.



**18. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine called "the Sacred Host"?**

*Because Jesus Christ is the true host or victim, immolated for us.*

The word "host," is a Latin word, and means victim : that is, something to be offered in sacrifice to Almighty God. Now it was upon the cross that Jesus Christ offered himself to his heavenly Father for the sins of all men, in a visible manner ; and it is at Mass that he still offers himself to his heavenly Father for our sins, in an invisible manner, under the appearances of bread and wine. At Mass, he is our daily host or victim. It is on this account that he is called the "sacred host."

**19. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine called "the Viaticum"?**

*Because viaticum means provision for a journey; and Jesus Christ, in this sacrament, is the spiritual food to strengthen us on our journey into eternity.*

The word "viaticum" is a Latin word, which means provision for a journey. Now when Jesus Christ, hidden under the sacramental species, is carried by the priest to a person dangerously sick he is called "the Viaticum," because he gives the dying person spiritual strength against the temptations of the devil and against the fear of death. So that many a sick person, after having received holy viaticum, exclaimed : "Never would I have imagined that it was so sweet to die!"

**20. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine called "the Bread of Life"?**

*Because Christ says: "I am the Bread of Life." (John vi., 48.) "And the bread that I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world." (John vi., 52.)*

Whilst Jesus Christ lived upon earth, his body looked like that of any other man, and so it does still in heaven, though shining with immortal glory and heavenly splendor. On certain occasions, however, he appeared under different forms. On Mount Thabor he appeared in celestial brightness. His face shone as the sun, and his garments were whiter than snow. After his resurrection his body was glorified and assumed the qualities of a spirit. He became visible and invisible at will. To St. Magdalen he appeared as a gardener. To his disciples going to Emmaus, he appeared as a stranger and traveller. In the Blessed Sacrament, however, he looks like bread, because the appearance of bread remains, even after consecration. But he tells us, that what looks like bread is not bread, but is his body for the life of the world. So, if Jesus takes the appearance of bread it is to remind us that, as bread is the food of our body, so is he, under the appearance of bread, the food of our souls. Besides, it is not unusual in Holy Scripture to continue to call beings after they have been changed into others, by the name they bore before the change. Thus, the blind man, after he had received his sight, is still called the blind man. (St. John, ix., 17.) Aaron's rod and the magicians' rods, after having been changed into serpents, are called rods. (Exod. vii., 12.) In like manner, the bread which, at Mass, has been changed into the body of Christ is still called bread. "The holy bread of eternal life," as the Church calls it in the canon of the Mass.

**21. Why is Jesus Christ present under the appearances of bread and wine called "Bread of Heaven"?**

*Because Christ says: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven." (John vi., 51.)*

Jesus Christ hidden under the appearance of bread is called "the bread of heaven," not because he is received in holy communion by the blessed spirits of heaven; oh, no! He is called "the bread of heaven," because he is as God the unspeakable happiness of the angels and saints in heaven, and as the Man-God, he is the spiritual food and happiness of our souls during our mortal career.

**22. What do we call the life which Jesus Christ lives under the appearance of bread and wine?**

*We call it the sacramental, or the eucharistic, or mystic life of Jesus Christ.*

In the whole range of the marvellous kingdom of life, from the coral in the depths of the sea, to the life of the highest angel, there is nothing half so wonderful and ineffable as the life of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. There is there the everlasting life of Jesus as Son of God in the bosom of his eternal Father. There is there the life of Jesus in his perfect human nature. There is also there, his glorious life of heaven, which he can never lose. Under the appearances of bread and wine, Jesus Christ possesses also a kind of life which is beyond all conception. It is called the sacramental, or eucharistic or mystic life of Jesus. As our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament is our food, his sacramental life in the host which we receive is to cease within us as soon as the species are consumed. Yet his body and blood, his life in heaven, his eucharistic life in the other hosts on earth, remain perfect and entire.

**III. WHY JESUS CHRIST HIDES HIMSELF IN THE HOLY EUCHARIST.**

"Verily Thou art a hidden God, the God of Israel, the

Saviour!" cries out the prophet Isaias. (xlv., 15.) Yes, undoubtedly, God is a more hidden God in the Eucharist than anywhere else. His greatness lies concealed under the littleness of a host, his power under the feeble species, his universality under an atom, his eternity under a moment, his wisdom under a seeming folly. There indeed is he the hidden God: more hidden than in Mary's womb, more hidden than in the crib, more hidden than amid the darkness of Calvary, more hidden than in the gloom of the Sepulchre. For here his humanity, his divinity, his glory, his beatitude—all, are hidden.

Now, why is it that our dear Saviour hides himself thus? It is to give us an opportunity to exercise our faith and to inspire us with confidence.

The existence of God among men in some sensible form is a want of the human heart. To satisfy this craving for the real presence of God, men used unholy means. Blinded by their passions they fell into idolatry, and instead of raising themselves to the true and pure God, they foolishly worshipped what they deemed the divine presence in stones, and plants, and animals. It was God himself who planted in the human heart this desire for the real presence, and God himself also found means to satisfy this desire.

The works of God attain to perfection slowly and gradually. This is the case in all, but especially in that most admirable of his works, the real presence. He first revealed himself to man by creation, which is a continual revelation of his presence, although he is hidden therein. The good and pure indeed behold God in creation; they see his power in the storm, in the cataract, in the earthquake. They see his wisdom in the laws that govern the



boundless universe. They see his beauty in the flower, in the sunbeam, and in the many-tinted rainbow. But the wicked and impure use this very creation only to deny and blaspheme the Creator.

God then made use of a more perfect means to reveal to man his divine presence. This was his Word. If a friend visits us at night, and finds us sitting in the dark, he speaks, he makes use of words to show that he is really present. In like manner, God wishing to reveal his real presence to man, sitting in the darkness of this life, has addressed him in words. This is the very first article of faith. God spoke to our first parents in the garden of paradise. He spoke to the patriarchs, to the prophets, and finally, as St. Paul assures us, he spoke for the last time by his only-begotten Son.

But merely to hear the voice of a friend is not enough; the heart longs for something more; the eyes yearn to look upon him. God knows this want of the human heart, and he has satisfied it also. The prophets besought him again and again to show himself. "Show us thy face, O Lord, and we shall be saved." This, too, was the ardent prayer of Moses. "O Lord, show me thy glory." (Exod. xxiii., 18.)

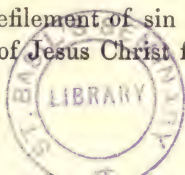
In the Old Law, God satisfied this desire by manifesting his real presence to the Israelites, under the form of a cloud, and of a pillar of fire. He next commanded an ark or tabernacle to be made, and there he manifested his real presence by a peculiar, supernatural light, called the *Shekinah*. But all this did not satisfy either man's heart or God's unbounded love. If we love a person dearly, it will not satisfy us to hear his voice or to see him in disguise; we wish to behold him face to face. God gratified even



this desire. He had commanded a tabernacle of wood to be made by the hand of man, and that tabernacle he choose for his dwelling place. But now with his own divine hands he has made a living tabernacle, holy and spotless, the Immaculate Virgin Mary; and in that tabernacle he has taken up his abode. There he has formed for himself a human body and soul. Thence he has come forth to live among men and to be as one of them.

In becoming man, God revealed his real presence to all our senses. Men saw God, heard God, even touched God. He had already revealed his real presence to man's reason in the creation, but man had forgotten him. He had revealed his real presence by his word, and man refused to listen to him. He had shown himself face to face to man, and man crucified him. There was now but one means left for God to reveal his real presence, and that was by faith. He hides himself from our senses; he hides himself from our reason. He reveals his presence in a far more perfect manner. He shows himself only to the eyes of faith in the Blessed Sacrament. The better to understand this, we must remember, that Jesus Christ is the spouse of the Catholic Church; with her he is more inseparably united than man and wife can be. The bond of his union is the immense love of Jesus Christ for his spouse. St. Paul holds up for imitation to married people this love of Jesus Christ for his spouse. "Husbands," he writes in his Epistle to the Ephesians, "love your wives as Christ also loves the Church and delivered himself up for her." (Chap. v., 25.)

Now all the faithful are members of this Church; they were cleansed from all defilement of sin in holy baptism. Hence it is that the love of Jesus Christ for a pure soul—



a member of his mystic body—ininitely exceeds that of a bridegroom for his bride. This exceedingly great love of Jesus Christ for his spouse induced him to stay with her to the consummation of the world. The reason, however, why our divine Saviour stays with his spouse on earth in a hidden manner, is because he is espoused to her in faith : his union with her being spiritual, not carnal, as was foretold by the prophet Osee, “ I will espouse thee to me forever, and I will espouse thee to me in grace and mercy ; and I will *espouse* thee to me in *faith*, and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.” (chap. ii., 19.)

Since our Lord then is espoused to the Church, *in faith*, it was fitting that he should be with her in a hidden manner, in order that her children might find therein a good opportunity to exercise their faith and obtain in heaven the reward promised in the Gospel to those who have not seen, *yet have believed*.

For this reason many of the saints, in order not to lose the merit of their faith, have gone so far as to beg our Lord not to favor them with those consoling manifestations of himself in the Blessed Sacrament which he has sometimes granted to his chosen servants.

One day, when St. Louis, king of France, was invited to go to a church in which our Lord appeared in the Holy Eucharist under the form of an infant, he replied : “ I will not go to see my Lord in the Holy Eucharist, because I *believe* as firmly that he is present there as if I had seen him. Let those go and see him who do not believe.”

Surius relates, in the life of St. Hugo, that a priest of a certain village in England, on breaking the sacred host one day at Mass, saw blood issuing from it, whereupon, filled with reverential awe, he determined to lead a holier life in future,

and in fact he soon became renowned for his sanctity. St. Hugo happened once to stop at this village. The priest related this miracle to him, and offered to show him the cloths which were yet stained with the miraculous blood; but the holy bishop refused to look at them, and would not even allow his attendants to do so, saying that such wonders and sensible proofs were only for those who did not believe. And when he noticed that some of his attendants had a desire to see them, he reprimanded them sharply, saying that this desire proceeded not from piety, but from curiosity, and that it was more perfect to believe without seeing, as our Lord himself assures us: "Blessed are they that have not seen and yet believe."

The second reason why our Lord hides himself is, that he may inspire us with confidence. If he were to show himself in all his glory, as he appears to the angels and saints in heaven, who would dare approach him? Surely, no one. But Jesus most earnestly desires to unite himself intimately to our souls, and, therefore, he conceals himself under the outward form of bread, that we may not be afraid of him. "Our great King," says St. Teresa, veils himself that we may receive him with greater confidence."

Just because Jesus Christ conceals himself from our eyes, he gives a great proof of his love, and shows that he thinks of us all,—of sinners as well as of the just. "How so?" you ask. I will tell you how.

First, then, with regard to sinners, Jesus renders them a great favor by concealing himself. We know that the best remedy for weak eyes is to exclude the light. We cannot look at a very bright object without our eyes being dazzled. None of us could look steadily at the sun at noon; if we should do so, we would become blind. We read in

holy scripture that Moses once conversed with God on a mountain, and that afterwards, when he came down to the Jews, his countenance was so radiant with light that they were unable to look upon him, and he was obliged to put a veil over his face when he spoke to them. Suppose now, beloved Christian, that Jesus Christ were to manifest himself on our altars in his heavenly splendor and glory, and one yet at enmity with God should come into the church,—how would he feel? Would he not be overwhelmed with awe and terror? Yea, a mortal agony would seize the poor wretch at the sight of Jesus. When Adam and Eve had sinned, they heard the voice of the Lord, who was walking about in paradise, and they hid themselves from the Lord in the midst of the garden. The mere sight of an offended God was insupportable to them. Cain acted in the same manner, after having killed his brother. “And Cain fled from the face of the Lord.” Oh! it is terrible for man to appear before God with a conscience laden with sin!

If, in our day, Jesus Christ were to show himself openly, sinners would flee from the church in order to avoid the angry countenance of their Judge. If one conscious of sin should dare to remain and brave the displeasure of his offended Lord, his heart would die within him before the angry glance of those eyes which are “as a flame of fire.” One single indignant look that Philip II., king of Spain, cast upon two of his courtiers, who behaved irreverently in church, was enough to drive one of them out of his senses and to kill the other. How, then, could a sinner endure the eye of Jesus Christ? We may judge, in some measure, from what took place when the Bethsamites looked upon the ark of the covenant with irreverent



curiosity. More than fifty thousand were punished with death for having gazed at the ark of the covenant which contained only a golden pot that had manna, and the rod of Aaron that had blossomed, and the tables of the covenant. "And the men of Bethsames said : ' Who can stand before the face of the Lord,—of that holy God ? '" Who, then, does not see that it is a great grace and benefit, for us and all sinners, that Jesus should veil himself from our view under the appearances of bread and wine ? Oh ! how considerate and amiable is the heart of Jesus ! He does not wish to meet openly with one who is his sworn enemy, and who, on that account, deserves nothing but his wrath and vengeance. He works one of his greatest miracles, and draws near to him without being seen. He keeps himself hidden under the poor veil of bread, that the sinner may not tremble and fear before his majesty and brightness, but may approach him with confidence to ask the pardon of his sins, and grace not to relapse into them again.

But, not only to sinners, but also to the just, does Jesus Christ show special love by concealing himself in the Blessed Sacrament. These, indeed, would not, like sinners, be conscience-stricken at the sight of Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, but they would, nevertheless, be almost *beside* themselves with amazement ; and, instead of entertaining a confident, childlike love and affection for him, they would feel an excessive and oppressive fear of him. As soon as the Queen of Saba saw Solomon sitting on his throne, in all his regal splendor, she became breathless and almost fainted away. This was natural. That which is too splendid repels rather than attracts ; and while an ordinary brightness pleases the eye, an intense, excessive brightness dazzles and blinds it.



Oh, what would happen if the Son of God were to appear on the altar in his divine majesty, surrounded with heavenly light and glory! What eye could behold his brightness? For, if even the few rays of light which our divine Saviour suffered to beam from his face on Mount Thabor, caused his disciples, intimate and familiar as they were with him, to fall to the ground in amazement and dismay, who could bear, in its full intensity, the glory of his countenance as it appears to the eternal but insatiable gaze of the elect, and which forms the heaven of heaven itself? Ah! in the glorious presence of Christ, even the just would be awe-stricken,—nay, they would perhaps die from distress and fear. At all events, they would not dare approach their divine Saviour with love and affection. No one would venture to draw near to him, in order to converse with him, and to explain to him his wants. The unfathomable mystery of the Blessed Sacrament would no longer be *amor amorum*—(i. e. love of all love, as St. Bernard calls it); it could no longer be called a pledge of love between God and man; but it would be a sacrament of glory and majesty, before which we should be obliged to bend the knee, not in love and confidence, but in fear and trembling. But no! Our divine Saviour, who loves us so excessively, wishes in this sacrament, to deal in all kindness with just and pious souls; to treat with them, not as a God of majesty with his subjects, but as a good father with his beloved children, as a brother with his brothers, a friend with his confidential friend, a bridegroom with his bride.

“*Comedite, amici, et bibite et inebriamini, carissimi,*” says he to us. “Eat, my friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my well-beloved!” “*Venite ad me omnes,*

*qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos.*” “Come to me all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you.” (Matt. xi., 28.) “*Venite omnes,*”—come all, without exception; come ye poor and suffering; come ye rich and prosperous; come ye despised; come ye honored ones of the earth; come ye servants and slaves; come ye princes and masters; come husbands and wives; come ye parents and children; come young men and young women; come great and small; come all, without any exception; come, my beloved children, whom I have redeemed; expose to me your wants and your troubles! *Ego reficiam vos*, I will refresh you, I will console you. *Venite*, come, then,—come without fear! I am waiting for you at all hours.

Consider this well, dear Christian, in order that you may approach him with childlike confidence, the most amiable heart of Jesus Christ invented this wonderful sacrament. He manifests his love by concealing his majesty and keeping himself hidden under the appearance of bread, as under a veil, which he suffers no single beam of his divinity to pierce, lest he might so awe us as to prevent our confidential intercourse with him. “It is on account of our weakness,” says Hugo de St. Victor, “that he does not show himself in the brightness of his majesty. He acts toward us as a prince or a king, who, having put aside his garments of state, appears in the company of his subjects without the insignia of his rank, not expecting from them the exact observance of court etiquette, or demonstrations of such great respect; but intending, on the contrary, to make merry and rejoice with them in all confidence and familiarity.

But here some one will say : " This is all very well ! Our Lord is certainly present in the Blessed Sacrament. But if we could only hear his voice, and see his blessed face, it would make such an impression on us that we could not help loving him, and then we would become saints." This is a sad mistake. What became of all those people who lived at the time of our Lord, who heard his voice and saw his blessed face ? Did they all profit by these graces ? Did they all become saints ? Did our Lord captivate their hearts ? What then were the actual effects of his visible presence among men ? Alas ! the prophetic words of holy Simeon proved only too true ; " He is set as a sign that shall be contradicted." To many his visible presence was only a stumbling block ; it made them only more hardened ; it rendered their sin only more unpardonable. Some, of course, were changed for the better ; but they were comparatively few indeed.

Look at the apostles. They had certainly the best possible opportunities for benefiting by our Lord's visible presence. They were constantly with him for over three years. They had him, so to speak, all to themselves. They witnessed all his miracles ; they heard all his instructions. He took special pains to form and sanctify them, and yet what was the result ? The whole result was, that, after three years, they were almost as ignorant and worldly-minded as when they first saw him. It is true, they had become greatly attached to our Lord and loved him sincerely ; but this love seems to have been in a great measure a mere human feeling. It was only when Christ's visible presence was taken from them that they really became saints.

Let us never forget that the visible presence of our Lord will not change our nature, nor make virtue easy

and natural to us. The words of our Lord will remain true as long as we live on earth: "Whoever wishes to be my disciple, must deny himself, take up his daily cross, and follow me." You will make just as much progress in virtue as you practise self-denial, and no more.

Heaven must be conquered. Our reward shall be in proportion to our difficulties and to our sacrifices. It is true, we can conquer only with the assistance of God's grace; but we may say with truth that this grace is given more abundantly by the invisible than by the visible presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

You say: It would be such a consolation to see our Lord face to face. Most assuredly it would. But, I ask, has the Blessed Eucharist no consolation for us? See what a source of consolation it has been to the saints. If we derive so little consolation from the Blessed Sacrament, perhaps it is our own fault,—perhaps it comes from our want of love.

This earth, which is the abode of the Holy Eucharist, would appear a kind of terrestrial paradise, if we were only capable of appreciating that precious treasure. Wonderful and ineffable truth which thrills every Catholic heart! Neither human nor angelic intelligence and imagination combined could ever, in their highest flights, have conceived the idea of power and love like this. "It is the Lord!" Ah yes, it is the Lord of heaven and earth. But he is hidden. To all unbelievers and heretics he is hidden indeed. To many lukewarm Catholics,—nay, even to many of those who stand at his altar and touch his sacred body, he is hidden. Alas, that that adorable sacrifice and sacrament of the altar should be to so many a hidden treasure; that there should be so many who have eyes and see not, although to them is granted to behold what kings and



prophets, and patriarchs and saints have sighed in vain to gaze on! Alas, how many are there who regularly assist at Mass, without ever entering into its spirit,—nay, without ever properly joining in the external ceremonies? How many are present at Mass with so much indifference, as clearly to show, that they either do not value these awful — these most beneficial mysteries, or that they understand little or nothing else than that the priest turns sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, and is clothed in a motley-colored garment! To them, Mass, Vespers or the performance of the funeral rites, are all pretty much the same thing. Again, how many are there who so often have entered into close intimacy with Jesus in holy communion, and yet seem not to know him? They know not his divinity in the sacred host, or their respect and veneration for it could not be so small. They know not his body and soul there present, for they do not imitate the example which he gave them on earth and gives them in this mystery of love. They know not his heart, which is ever open to them with charity inexhaustible, for they still seem to doubt its goodness and meekness, its tender love and its unbounded mercy. They know not his sanctity, or they would not appear at the altar, without gravity, without devotion, and without reverence. They know not his high dignity, or they would not touch him with such coldness and thoughtlessness, nor would they approach the altar in a state of unworthiness. Indeed were they thoroughly impressed with the thought that in the adorable sacrament of his love they receive *their Lord and their God*,—had they a lively conviction of this truth, would they dare approach him as they do, without preparation, without sorrow, humility, or reverence?



Would they presume, after having received him, their Redeemer, to employ the eyes that have contemplated their God, in the indulgence of curiosity,—the tongue on which he has reposed, in slander, raillery, or expressions wounding charity? Would they profane the heart into which he has entered, by inordinate affections, anger, hatred, or envy? Whence is it that they relapse so frequently into habitual failing, and draw so little profit from hearing Mass and receiving holy communion? It is because they know him not in the mystery of his love.

They are like the friends of a young Portuguese who travelled to India to seek his fortune. After many years he returned to Europe, with several of his vessels laden with wealth, the fruits of his toil and industry. Having arrived at his native place, "Hold," said he to himself, "I must play a trick on my relations." He put on soiled garments and a torn cloak, and hastened to the house of his cousin, Peter. In this disguise he claimed relationship: "I am your cousin, John," said he. "I have passed several years in India; I now return to visit my friends and native land once more. You see my position. By the ties of kindred, I crave hospitality at your hands." "Ah! would to heaven I could accommodate you, my dear John," replied Peter. "Excuse me, my house is occupied." John, playing his rôle, proceeds to another friend's house, makes the same request and receives the same reply. Everywhere he receives the same treatment. His poverty-stricken appearance closed every door against him. Ah! poor deluded friends, little did you imagine that under that tattered garment a man of wealth lay concealed. John hastened back to his ships, cast aside his beggar's dress, robed himself in costly attire, and, followed by a multitude of servants,

proceeded at once to purchase a princely dwelling in the very heart of the city. His fabulous wealth, his lordly retinue, his high-blooded steeds, were the talk of the whole neighborhood. The news soon reached the ears of his friends. Picture to yourself, if you can, their amazement! How changed would their conduct now be if the opportunity did but present itself anew! "What is the meaning of all this?" said one to the other. "Could you have supposed this for a moment? Had I but known this before, my friend would have met with very different treatment at my hands; but alas! it is now too late. We have repulsed him forever. Why have we known him too late!"

This story is an illustration of what takes place between Christians and their Lord. This man went to his friends as a beggar, attired in poor, tattered garments, disguising thus his affluence and power. In the Holy Eucharist, does not our blessed Lord act in the same manner? Does he, while silently remaining enclosed in our tabernacles, by day and by night, display his heavenly glory and brightness? No; but he there remains, as it were, in a poor, tattered dress, under the humble appearance of bread. This stranger came to his friends a second time in rich and royal attire, escorted by numerous attendants. Jesus Christ will come again, at the end of the world, enthroned on the clouds of heaven, in great power and majesty. Myriads of angels and blessed spirits will surround him on every side, for wealth, power and glory, are his. To whom can we compare those unkind friends of our tale? To a very great number of Christians of the present day. How is that? you will ask. Because, as these men paid little or no attention to their relative in his

poverty, so, in like manner, a great many Christians pay little or no attention to Jesus Christ, when humbly concealed in the sacrament of his love.

But when this life is over and they come to see him face to face, whom they possessed here in the Holy Eucharist,—at the sight of the consolations, the beauty, and the riches that they failed to recognize in time, they will be forced to exclaim: “O Jesus! dear Saviour, why have we known thee too late! Ah! had we only known thee in thy mystery of love, while on earth, we would have allowed no opportunity to pass without assisting at the celebration of thy sacred mysteries, and receiving thee, in holy communion. Not an hour should have passed without a thought of thee. Thou wouldst have been our whole delight, our whole joy, our whole happiness, the object of all our desires, thoughts and actions. O dear Lord, why have we known thee too late!

Our dear Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament is hidden and silent. He expects that his faithful servants, especially his priests, on reflecting what he has done for them in this mystery, will become inflamed with such love for him that whenever they speak of his real presence, every word of theirs shall be a fiery dart piercing the hearts of their hearers with that same divine love, and light of faith, and ardor of devotion, which are burning in their own hearts. This is indeed what Jesus Christ expects from every good priest, especially in our time when faith in this great mystery grows weaker every day, not only among the higher classes of society, but even among the common people, especially among the young. With great reason, indeed, did the Council of Trent command all the pastors of congregations frequently to explain the Holy Eucharist

to the faithful, that at least they may not be answerable for any want of respect, and devotion of which the people may be guilty of in our churches. The fathers of the council were fully convinced that the power and influence of the Church over the hearts of men depended on the efforts which her priests would make to enkindle in souls a lively faith in, and an ardent love for, the sacred mysteries. "Many are infirm and weak among you," writes St. Paul to the Corinthians, "and many sleep" in sin and indifference towards God and their own salvation, "because they discern not the body of the Lord;" that is, because they are ignorant of the great treasure of the Holy Eucharist. As Samson was celebrated for his extraordinary bodily strength, so is the Catholic Church noted for her extraordinary spiritual strength. Were she asked, like Samson, whence she derives all this invincible strength and vitality, she would answer,—"It is from our faith in the real presence; it is from holy communion. Take away the Blessed Sacrament, and we are shorn of our strength, weak like the rest of mankind."

#### IV. HOW JESUS CHRIST CONFIRMED HIS FOLLOWERS IN THEIR FAITH IN REGARD TO THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

We read in the Gospel of St. Matthew (Chap. xvi., 15.) that our divine Redeemer one day asked his disciples to tell him whom men took him to be. The disciples answered that some said he was John the Baptist, others that he was Elias, others again that he was Jeremias or one of the prophets. Then Jesus asked, "But whom do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "Thou art Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus replied: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood hath not



revealed it to thee, but my Father, who is in heaven ; ” that is to say, it is not by your senses, or by any human means, that you know for certain that I am the Son of God, for your senses behold in me but an ordinary man, but my heavenly Father has enlightened you to know that I am his Son,—God and man at the same time. For this faith of yours, I call you blessed.

Now, suppose our Lord Jesus Christ should say to Protestants : “ Tell me, what is the consecrated host ? ” Some of them would answer : It is but a figure of thy body ; others, again, would reply : It will become thy body in the mouth of the recipient : whilst others still would give some other answer. But were our Lord to ask every one of the two hundred millions of Catholics all over the world, all would at once answer like St. Peter : “ The consecrated host is thy own body, O Christ, thou Son of the living God, for the simple reason that thou hast made it, and therefore declared it to be thy body. And Jesus then would answer what he said to St. Peter : “ Blessed are you, because it is not flesh and blood that has revealed it to you : it is not by your senses, that you know the consecrated host to be really my body, but by the gift of faith bestowed upon you by my heavenly Father.” Most assuredly then, the heavenly Father has not revealed himself to those who do not believe in his Son in the consecrated host.

We believe then most firmly that the Lord of heaven and earth—our dear Saviour and future Judge—dwells amongst us in the Blessed Sacrament on our altars. This was the belief and the doctrine of the apostles, and of all the councils and Fathers of the Church. This doctrine hundreds of popes and bishops and priests defended and laid down their lives in its defence, and millions of



Catholics are yet ready to do the same at any moment, should God require the sacrifice of their lives in confirmation of this doctrine. And why? Because Catholics are infallibly certain of this truth; they feel as certain of it as Marie Bernard Bauer, a Jewish convert, felt after his conversion to the Catholic faith in 1865.

Marie Bernard Bauer is the son of one of the wealthiest Jewish families in Vienna. At an early age, the young Jew, fiery and enthusiastic, and gifted with singular eloquence, threw himself into the ranks of the Revolution, and became one of its most ardent emissaries. At eighteen, he was entrusted with important missions, and considered a rising Freemason. During his travels he became acquainted with a young Frenchman, a zealous Catholic, whose influence and friendship laid the foundation of his conversion. He visited his friend and his mother also, who by her example rather than by her exhortations contributed to the work of grace begun in his soul by her son's solicitations. Bauer wore, at the request of these two, a medal of the Immaculate Conception. After being fully instructed in the faith, he required nothing but grace to believe. While at Lyons, on the Feast of Corpus Christi, he happened to be standing on a balcony, with several worldly acquaintances; the procession of the Blessed Sacrament was to pass below, and they, with cigars in their mouths, and mockery in their hearts, were watching for the pageant. No change came over the young Jew until the canopy under which the priest carried the divine host was close beneath the balcony. The change at that moment was lightning-like. Faith entered his heart, or rather—as he himself afterwards declared—a conviction of the real presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament so absolute that it made itself felt throughout his whole being.

It was by means of this light of faith, that he saw our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament more distinctly than if our Lord had appeared to him in some sensible manner. The same *knowledge*, so to speak, returned to him many times since while consecrating at Mass, and he said he could not *believe* merely, in a matter of which he was so blissfully and unerringly certain. As Jesus passed, Bauer threw himself on his knees and professed himself a Christian.

It was in consequence of this most intimate conviction that he concluded one of his discourses in Paris, as follows : “ And thou, Lord Jesus, who art the Truth ‘ that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world,’ (John i.,) let it not come to pass that one soul out of this great assemblage shall return this day from the foot of this pulpit to the common turmoil of the world without bearing within itself the ineffable wound of a dawning conviction. And if, O Lord ! thou requirest unto this end the sacrifice of a human life, let this day be my last on earth, and this hour the last of my mortal pilgrimage.”—*Catholic World*, May, 1872.

Such should be the living faith of every Catholic. Such, indeed, has been the faith of millions of Catholics who have laid down their lives in defence of their holy religion. All the splendor and majesty displayed in our worship, the magnificence of our temples, the beauty and variety of our ceremonies, the choice works which our worship unceasingly demands from architecture, sculpture, painting, music, poetry, eloquence, and all the arts ; those efforts so prodigious in the countries and ages of faith, efforts to raise up to the very clouds the dwelling of God on earth, to surround the Eucharistic victim with incense, hymns and flowers,—all these monuments of faith and a love which never says, *It is enough*,—all have their foundation in our

belief in the real presence of Jesus Christ upon our altars. We pray, we kneel down, we adore, we sing hymns of gladness, because *He* is there ! The lamp burns day and night, clouds of incense rise, because Jesus is there. His presence cannot tolerate in his temple anything profane ; it calls for the pomp, the majesty, the gravity of the most imposing ceremonies ; for all the outward marks of respect and reverence which the circumstances permit.

This faith in the real presence is the dove with the olive branch come to proclaim the passing away of the mighty deluge of sin ; it rouses the lukewarm from the fatal lethargy that has fallen upon their souls ; it brings sinners back to God, it inflames the pious with more ardent love for Jesus Christ ; it causes the unbeliever to reflect on the truths of our religion ; it dispels the clouds of religious error ; it puts the devil to flight and makes him tremble ; it brings down the angels from heaven upon earth to stay with the Christians and defend them against the attacks of Satan ; it opens the source of all heavenly benedictions ; it brings true peace and joy into the heart. It is this faith that disposes the heart for participating in the plenitude of this divine mystery and makes it easy for the soul to contemplate the Son of God, to approach him with ardor, and to enjoy him in peace. It is this faith that keeps the interior eye of the soul forever fixed, not upon the weak accidents that show themselves to the senses, but on the Son of God, the King of glory, who veils the splendor of his countenance that the soul may have easy access to his mercy, unawed by the greatness of his majesty. This is the faith that causes the heart to leap with joy, and give forth acts of every virtue, in order to receive with greater reverence the divine Guest who honors it with his presence. This faith fills the soul

with hope to approach him with gladness; with humility to lose herself in profound respect; with charity to embrace him; with devotion to render him homage; with obedience to submit herself to his divine will. This is the spirit that concentrates all the powers of the soul in a profound recollection, and banishes whatever can interrupt her conversation with her dearly beloved Saviour, Jesus Christ. It introduces her into the true kingdom of God, leading her frequently to the sacred banquet to unite herself with her divine Spouse by means of the Blessed Sacrament.

To preserve this lively faith in the real presence, our dear Saviour has made use of different means.

FIRST MEANS.—*The Feast of Corpus Christi.*

Jesus Christ, who calls himself the Good Shepherd, foresaw that Luther, Calvin and other ravenous wolves, would arise in the sixteenth century, and carry off many of his sheep: that they would kill them by undermining their faith in the real presence, and by thus preventing them from eating the “Bread of Life,”—the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in holy communion. Luther acknowledged that “the ecclesiastical hierarchy, colleges, monasteries, temples, chapels, altars,—in a word, the whole Church of the Pope, with his sacerdotal kingdom, is built upon the faith in the real presence.” (De Abrog. Miss. priv.) It was, therefore, Luther’s opinion that in no wise could he hurt the sheep of Jesus Christ more than by undermining their faith in the real presence. Jesus had foreseen this. So, to prove himself a good shepherd to his flock, he made use of a wonderful means to awaken and strengthen their faith in the Blessed Sacrament. This means was the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi.



Many a century had passed over the Church of Christ before there was any distinct feast of the Blessed Sacrament, and when, in the thirteenth century, our Lord wished to have it instituted, he chose a holy nun to be the instrument of this devotion in his Church. St. Thomas was living then, and so was St. Louis; but God chose neither the learning of the one nor the royal power of the other to be the means of executing his desire. From the age of sixteen, for many years, a vision perpetually haunted a young Belgian nun, Juliana of Retinne, whenever she knelt in prayer. A brilliant moon continually appeared before her, with one small portion obscured and invisible. She tried in vain to chase the vision away; at last our Lord himself came to explain it to her. He said it was to show that the ritual year of the Church would remain incomplete until the Blessed Sacrament had a feast of its own, and he wished it to be instituted for the following reasons:—

1st. In order that the Catholic doctrine may receive aid from the institution of this festival, at a time when the faith of the world is growing cold, and heresies are rife.

2dly. That the faithful, who love and seek truth and piety, may be enabled to draw from this source of life new strength and vigor to walk continually in the way of virtue.

3dly. That irreverence and sacrilegious behavior towards the divine majesty in this adorable Sacrament may, by sincere and profound adoration, be extirpated and repaired.

Lastly. He bade her announce to the Christian world his will that this feast should be observed.

Tremblingly the maiden received the command, and heartily did she pray to be released from the charge. Our Lord answered her, that the solemn devotion which he



ordered to be observed, was to be begun by her, and to be propagated by the poor and lowly. Twenty long years had passed away and the secret still lay hidden in Juliana's breast; she dared not reveal it to any one, and yet an interior impulse urged her on. So terrible was her repugnance that she shed tears of blood. At length she disclosed it to her confessor, and, with her leave, he consulted others, especially James de Threzis, archdeacon at the Cathedral of Liege. This priest was afterwards, for his piety and learning, elected Bishop of Verdun, then Patriarch of Jerusalem, and at last Pope of Rome, under the name of Urban IV.

From that time it became a public question, and sorely were men divided upon it. Canons and monks protested against the new devotion, and urged that the daily sacrifice was sufficient to commemorate the love of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, without a special day being particularly assigned for that purpose. But the faithful nun prayed on; civil discord raged around her; the city where she lived was lost and won—sacked by a lawless army, and retaken; three successive convents were either burned or otherwise destroyed over her head, yet no earthly troubles could make her neglect the task which had been assigned to her. She died before it was accomplished, yet she had done enough in her lifetime to provide for its execution. In her wanderings, she had met with a few men with devotion to feel and learning to defend the feast of the Blessed Sacrament. When she was in her grave, the sovereign pontiff, Urban IV., wrote to inform one of her companions that he himself had celebrated the feast, with the cardinals, in the holy city. He promulgated the following Brief concerning the feast of the body of our divine Saviour:

“URBAN, BISHOP,

*Servant of the Servants of God, to our Venerable Brethren, the Patriarchs, Archbishops, and other Prelates of the Church :*

When our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, ere he left the world and returned to his Father, ate, on the eve of his passion, the Last Supper with his disciples, he instituted the most holy and precious sacrament of his body and blood, in which he gave us the former for our food and the latter for our drink ; ‘for as often as we eat of this bread and drink of this chalice, we show the death of our Lord.’ At the institution of this mystery, he said to his apostles : ‘Do this in commemoration of me’—giving them to understand that the great and adorable sacrament which he thus instituted, was the greatest and most excellent remembrance of his infinite love towards us ; an admirable, agreeable, sweet, secure, and supremely excellent remembrance, in which all the benefits of God are renewed, in a manner above all comprehension ; in which we can find every pleasure, every sweetness and the most secure pledge of eternal life. It is the sweetest, holiest, and most salutary remembrance, which recalls to our mind the great grace of our redemption ; which keeps us from evil, and strengthens us in good ; which promotes our advancement in virtue and grace, as our divine Saviour produces in us all these effects by his real presence.

“The other mysteries which the Church reveres, we adore in spirit and in truth, but in none of them do we enjoy the real presence thereof. It is only in the commemoration of the Last Supper that Jesus Christ is truly present and truly with us. When he ascended into heaven, he said to his apostles and disciples : ‘Behold I will be with

you unto the end of the world.' He said this in order to console them for his absence, and to assure them that he would remain forever corporally among them. O worthy and ever adorable remembrance, which reminds us that death has lost its sting, and that we are saved from ruin, since the living body of the Lord, which was raised upon the wood of the Cross, has restored life to us. It is a most glorious remembrance, which fills the faithful with salutary joy, and causes them, in the expression of their gratitude, to weep tears of thanksgiving. We exult at the remembrance of our redemption, and, because it reminds us of the death of Jesus, who purchased us, we cannot restrain our tears. Over this mystery, which prepares joy for us and elicits our tears, we rejoice weeping and weep with joy, because our hearts are entranced with gladness at the remembrance of so great a benefit, and, in the sense of the most just gratitude which we owe it, we cannot refrain from tears. O infinite, O divine love! O exceedingly great condescension of our God! O astounding miracle of his liberality! Not satisfied with making us masters of the goods of this world, he even places all creatures at our disposal. This was not even enough for his goodness. He raised man to so great a dignity, as to give him angels to guard him: he gave celestial spirits to serve and to guide the elect to the possession of the inheritance which is prepared for them in heaven.

“After so many brilliant proofs of his munificence, he has given us a still greater pledge of his unspeakable charity, by bestowing himself on us. Exceeding the very fulness of his gifts, and the very measure of his love, he offers himself for our food and drink. O sublime and admirable liberality, in which the giver is the gift, and the gift is the very one who gives! O unexampled

liberality, by which God gives himself! Our God has given himself to be our food, because man, having been condemned to death, can be restored to life by this means only. By eating the forbidden fruit he incurred death, and by partaking of the tree of life, he has been redeemed. In the former was the sting of death, in the latter the food of life. By eating the former he inflicted a wound upon himself; by eating of the latter he recovered health. Thus the partaking of the one food wounded him, the partaking of the other healed him. Wound and cure proceed from the same source, and what entailed death upon us has restored us to life. Of the former it is said: 'On the day on which you shall eat thereof, you shall die the death;' and of the latter, 'He that eats of this bread shall live for ever.' O substantial food, which perfectly satisfies and truly nourishes, not the body, but the heart; not the flesh, but the soul!

"Our compassionate Redeemer, who knew that man needed spiritual nourishment, has, in this institution of charity and mercy, prepared for his soul the most precious and most nourishing food that his wisdom could devise. There is nothing more befitting the divine liberality and charity, than for the eternal Word of God, who is the real repast of the rational creature, after he was made flesh,—to give himself to flesh and blood, that is to say, to man, for his nourishment. Man eats the bread of angels, and, therefore, our Lord said: 'My flesh is meat indeed!' This divine bread is eaten, but it is not changed, because it assumes no other form in him who eats it. It transforms the worthy receiver into him whom it contains. O most excellent, most adorable, and most venerable sacrament, to which we can never give adequate praise,



honor and glory, and whose benefits we can never justly extol! O sacrament, which is worthy of being revered from the bottom of the heart, loved with the most tender and fervent affection, and of being engraven upon our memory in indelible characters! O most precious remembrance, which ought to be made known and exalted in all places; which all Christians ought ever to remember with feelings of the deepest gratitude; which we can never sufficiently meditate upon or ever sufficiently worship! We are, therefore, bound to cherish a perpetual remembrance of it, so that we may constantly have him before our eyes, who offers this inestimable benefit to us. For the more we consider the gift, the more we prize him who bestows it.

“Although we daily commemorate this benefit in the holy sacrifice of the Mass, yet we think it just that, in order to confound the infidelity and madness of heretics, we should celebrate, at least once in the year, a feast, in its honor, with the greatest pomp and magnificence possible. On the day on which Jesus Christ instituted this sacrament, the Church is occupied with the reconciliation of sinners, the blessing of the holy oils, the washing of the feet, and other mysteries. Wherefore, sufficient time is not left to honor this most sublime sacrament, and thus it becomes necessary to appoint another day for this end. Finally, it is the custom of the Church to devote particular days for the veneration of her saints, although she daily honors them by prayers, litanies, in the Mass, etc., as also on other occasions. But, since on these days, Christians often do not comply with their duties towards the saints, either through negligence, or press of domestic affairs, or from human weakness, our Mother, the holy Church, has appointed a certain day for the general commemoration of

all the saints ; so that by this solemnity the omissions which perchance, have occurred, may be repaired. Now, if this has already been introduced into the Church, how much more are we not bound to do the same with regard to the life-giving sacrament of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, who is the glory and the crown of all the saints ! We shall then be enabled to repair and make up for our want of devotion, and other defects which we may have been guilty of, in hearing Mass, and ask our Lord's pardon for the same. At the time when our dignity was not so elevated as it now is, we learned how the Lord revealed to some few Catholics that the feast of Corpus Christi was to be celebrated throughout the whole Church. Therefore in order to strengthen and exalt the true faith, we have thought it just and reasonable to ordain that, besides the commemoration which the Church daily makes of this holy sacrament, a particular festival shall be celebrated every year, on a certain day, namely, on the fifth day of the week after the octave of Pentecost, on which day pious people will vie with one another in hastening in great crowds to our churches, where the clergy and laity will chant holy hymns of praise and gladness. On this memorable day, faith shall triumph, hope shall be enhanced, charity shall shine, piety shall exult, our temples shall re-echo our hymns of exultation, and pure souls shall thrill with holy joy. On this day of devotion, all the faithful shall hasten to our churches with joyful hearts, to discharge their obligations with unlimited obedience, and thus, in a worthy manner, celebrate this great feast. May the Lord vouchsafe to inflame them with so holy a zeal, that, by the exercise of their piety towards him who has redeemed them, they may increase in merit, and that he

may also give himself to them in this life for their food. May this God likewise be their reward in the other world. We, therefore, inform and exhort you, in the name of the Lord and through the apostolic letters we command you, in virtue of holy obedience, and enjoin upon you to have, every year, on the above-named fifth day of the week, this so glorious and praiseworthy feast celebrated in all the churches and places in your diocese. Moreover, we command you to exhort, yourself and through others, those under your charge, so to prepare themselves, the Sunday before, by a perfect and sincere confession, by alms, by prayers and other good works, which are suitable to this day of the most Blessed Sacrament, that they may reverently partake of the same, and by this means receive an increase of grace. And as we also desire to stimulate, by spiritual gifts, the faithful to the celebration and veneration of this feast, we grant to him or her, who, truly penitent, shall confess his or her sins, and attend the morning service or vespers of the day, one hundred days' indulgence; and to him or her who is present at Prime, Tierce, Sext, None and Compline, forty days for each of these hours.

“Finally, relying upon the merciful omnipotence of God, and trusting in the authority of the holy apostles Peter and Paul, we remit to him or her, who, during this octave, shall be present at the morning service, Vespers and Mass, one hundred days of penance imposed upon them.”

From the time of the promulgation of this Brief, the triumph of the Blessed Sacrament was complete; St. Thomas Aquinas composed its office; the devotion spread through the length and breadth of Europe. In Catholic countries, every church, from the cathedral of the royal

city to the village chapel, keeps the festival. This feast is celebrated with all possible magnificence and pomp. The solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament is the public recognition by the Catholic world of the real presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament; it is a reversal of the judgment that an unbelieving world would pass upon our Lord and a compensation for the outrages which it has inflicted on him. As he was once in the most ignominious manner led as a malefactor through the streets of Jerusalem from Annas to Caiphas, from Caiphas to Pilate, from Pilate to Herod, from one tribunal to another, on this day he is borne in triumph through the church and open streets, as the spotless Lamb and as man's highest Good.

In his sufferings he had no other witnesses than envious and unworthy Jews. Now, on this day, every knee bends in adoration before him. The executioner once led him forth to death, but, in this procession, the great ones of the world mingle with the throng to do him reverence. Then his ears resounded with the most scornful and outrageous blasphemies, but now, on this great festival, the Church greets him with music and songs of praise. The crown of thorns that once pierced his brow is now exchanged for the wreath of flowers around the remonstrance, while civil magistrates with their insignia and troops of heroes, with glittering arms and waving banners, replace the fierce Roman soldiers, who once kept watch around his dark and silent tomb. The cross which Jesus bore with sorrow and sweat, up the rugged hill of Calvary, is, on this day of triumph, carried before all as the sign of victory. Jesus himself, who was lifted upon it, is now, in the Blessed Sacrament, raised aloft to impart his benediction to his kneeling and adoring people.



It is thus that on this memorable day faith triumphs, hope is enhanced, charity shines forth, piety exults, our temples re-echo with hymns of exultation, pure souls thrill with holy joy, the faith of the lukewarm is awakened, whilst infidelity and heresy are confounded. It cannot be doubted, therefore, that the institution of this solemn feast of Corpus Christi, has ever since its first celebration been a most powerful means of awakening and confirming the faith in the real presence.

Filled with these pious sentiments, let us, too, sing with holy joy, on this glorious festival of our Lord's body and blood :—

Come forth, come forth,  
Beyond these narrow walls !  
Forth, to the fields, now decked with summer flowers :  
The clear blue sky,  
The woodland green now calls,  
While gay birds sing amid the blooming bowers.  
Our hidden Lord comes forth with love to bless  
Fair nature fallen yet wreathed with loveliness.

Come forth, come forth  
Into the minster nigh,  
Which God's own hands have formed, in beauty beaming :  
Whose floor, the earth,  
Whose dome, the azure sky,  
Whose golden light, the sun in glory gleaming.  
The love that burns in Jesus' throbbing breast  
Must overflow till all around are blest.

He longs to bless  
The fields where oft, of yore,  
He healed and preached to hearts bowed down with sadness,  
The golden wheat,  
The grape, whose purple store  
He changed to draught divine of life and gladness,  
To bless the sin-cursed, speechless things of earth  
That ever yearn and sigh for their new birth.

SECOND MEANS—*Excommunication—Preaching and writing in defence of the Real Presence.*

If one member of the body endangers the others, the physician, often, amputates it in order to save the whole body. Now, in the sixteenth century especially, many Catholics had grown lukewarm and indifferent, even towards Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Although the solemn celebration of the festival of Corpus Christi is so powerful a means to enliven the Catholic faith in the real presence, it did not produce the desired effect upon all lukewarm Catholics. They treated their good Shepherd in this divine mystery as a stranger. It is the lukewarm and indifferent Catholics who have always done the most harm in the Church. They have lost all relish for God ; they are deprived of all consolation ; they wander more and more from the ways of providence ; they sin without remorse or fear ; they fly from confession and communion ; they are sick, but unconscious that they are ailing ; they are wicked, but blind to their vices ; they are slaves, but believe themselves free ; they abuse all remedies, reject every inspiration, are impervious to the impressions of grace. Hence it comes that the lukewarm dishonor virtue, cry down devotion, scandalize their neighbors, and become a burden to the Church. They sin against the Holy Ghost, they afflict the sacred heart of Jesus, and by their stubbornness and sin, compel him to cast them forth with loathing ; and very often they die in their sins.

To rid himself of these sheep and to prevent them from communicating their contagion to others, as well as to rouse the others from their fatal state of lethargy, and make them become better Christians, our divine Shepherd was forced to cut them off. He permitted Protestantism,

one of the greatest evils in the world, to arise. But as the Lord is wisdom itself, he knows how to draw good out of evil. One good, fervent Catholic is dearer to his heart than a thousand who are lukewarm and indifferent. Protestantism separated the lukewarm and dead members of the mystic body of Christ from the living members. These lukewarm and sinful Catholics followed Luther, the apostate-monk and great heresiarch of the sixteenth century.

All those apostate Catholics were solemnly excommunicated by the Council of Trent, that is, cut of as rotten members from the body of Christ—the Catholic Church.

“I say unto you, that not one of those men shall taste of my supper.” It was in these words that our Lord fulminated the first anathema. Following our Lord’s example the Catholic Church, which has received the keys of heaven, and consequently of the tabernacle, the Church to which the dispensation of the mysteries of God has been committed, when she is obliged to punish great offenders, says to them: You shall sit no more at the table of Jesus Christ, whom you have offended. You shall drink no more of the chalice of salvation. You shall see your brethren press around the feast of their common Father, but you shall remain fasting; you shall be condemned to have no other nourishment than the gross food of the body, and so perish by spiritual famine, unless your penitence obtain for you the viaticum of the dying. “Thus excommunication, or separation from the Holy Eucharist,” says St. Augustine, “is the greatest punishment inflicted by the Church. Those from whom the ‘bread of life’ has been withdrawn will perish from want of spiritual food.”

Protestantism has ever been a most bitter antagonist of the Church. It has denied and combated her most vital

doctrines, especially that of the real presence. There must be scandals,—a fatal, though divine warning! There must be storms in nature to purify the air from dangerous elements. In like manner God permits storms—heresies to arise in his Church on earth, that the erroneous and impious doctrines of heretics may, by way of contrast, set forth in clearer light the true and holy doctrines of the Church. As light is in the midst of darkness, gold contrasted with lead, the sun among the planets, the wise among the foolish,—so is the Catholic Church among non-Catholics. If two things of different natures, says the wise man, be brought into opposition, the eye perceives their difference at once. “Good is set against evil, and life against death; so also is the sinner against the just man. And so look upon all the works of the Most High. Two and two and one against another.” (Eccl. xxxiii.) Christ then permits the storms of heresies to burst upon his Church, to bring forth into clearer light his divine doctrine and to remove dangerous elements from his mystic body. In fighting heresies, the Church defines her own doctrines in clear terms, and sets forth solid arguments in confirmation. It is certain that the doctrine of the real presence was never so fiercely attacked by any heretic as by Luther and his companions. The consequence was, that ever since that time the priests of the Catholic Church have been obliged to defend this holy doctrine and uphold it by the most convincing and undeniable arguments. It is thus that they increase their own faith in this mystery of love as well as that of the flock of Jesus Christ. Thus has our Lord drawn good from evil; thus has salvation come to his Church—from the very enemies of our religion.



THIRD MEANS.—*Holy angels proclaim the Real Presence.*

We know from holy Scripture that Almighty God made use of the angels to bear witness that Christ is God and the Saviour of the world. The angel Gabriel said to the Blessed Virgin: "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore, also, the Holy One which shall be born of thee, shall be called the *Son of God*." (Luke i., 35.) "Thou shalt call his name Jesus," said the angel to St. Joseph, "for he shall save his people from their sins. (Matt. i., 21.)

When Christ was born, an angel appeared to the shepherds, saying: "Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke ii., 8-11.)

When our dear Saviour was tempted by Satan, he said to him: "Begone, Satan: for it is written, "The Lord thy God shalt thou adore, and him only shalt thou serve." Then the devil left him, and behold *angels came and ministered to him*. (Matt. iv., 10, 11.) Now if angels accompanied our Lord whilst he was living in this world, it is not in the least surprising to read that they surround their Lord and King in the Blessed Sacrament, where, though hidden from us, he is not hidden from them. St. John Chrysostom says, that choirs of angels are surrounding the altar whilst Jesus Christ is a victim upon it. St. Euthymius, when saying Mass, often saw many angels assisting at the sacred mysteries in reverential awe. At other times he beheld an immense flame of fire coming down from heaven which enveloped him and his assistant till the holy sacrifice was ended. (Life by Cyrillus.) In the same manner the

Holy Ghost, in the form of a fiery flame, surrounded St. Anastasius whilst celebrating Mass. (Life by St. Basil.) St. Guduvalus, archbishop, who always prepared himself for the celebration of this most august sacrifice, by fasting, vigils and many fervent prayers, often saw the angels descending from heaven during Mass, and chanting hymns of praise with unspeakable reverence.

Of these hymns of praise St. Bridget writes thus: "One day, when a priest was celebrating Mass, I saw, at the moment of consecration, all the powers of heaven set in motion. I heard, at the same time, a heavenly melody, most sweet, and most harmonious. Numberless angels came down; their chant no human understanding can conceive, nor the tongue of man describe. They surrounded and looked upon the priest, bowing towards him in reverential awe. The devils commenced to tremble, and took to flight in the greatest confusion and terror."

Once, at Easter, Pope Gregory I. celebrated Mass in the church of St. Maria Maggiore and having said the words, "*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*," an angel of the Lord answered in a loud voice, "*Et cum spiritu tuo*." For this reason, when the Pope celebrates Mass on that day in the above-named church and says, "*Pax Domini sit semper vobiscum*," no answer is made. (Life by John the Deacon.) We read in the life of St. Oswald, bishop, that an angel used to assist him at Mass, and make all the necessary answers. In a procession at Valencia, when blessed Nicolas Fattori was carrying the Blessed Sacrament, all at once a flock of birds came and formed a crown just above the canopy, singing most melodiously, and steadily accompanying the procession, their warbling notes harmonizing beautifully with the ecclesiastical chant. When,

afterwards, he was asked about this, he answered with a smile, that they were angels who came from heaven to honor their divine King. (1 Life.)

Now no reasonable man will believe the angels would descend from heaven and surround the altar in the humblest attitude to adore and honor a piece of bread. It is then not bread, but the King of heaven under the appearances of bread and wine whom the angels come to adore, and thus proclaim his real presence.

FOURTH MEANS.—*Souls in Purgatory proclaim the Real Presence.*

We know that with God's permission souls detained in purgatory have appeared to their friends on earth, and have said that nothing gives them so great a relief in their pains as the holy sacrifice of the Mass ; because in it, as they solemnly declared, is offered up, not bread and wine, but the most precious blood of Jesus Christ.

The blessed Henry Suso made an agreement with one of his brethren in religion, that as soon as either of them died, the survivor should say two Masses, every week, for one year, for the repose of his soul. Now it came to pass that the religious with whom Henry had made this contract died first. Henry prayed, every day, for his deliverance from purgatory, but forgot to say the Masses which he had promised ; whereupon, the deceased religious appeared to him, with a sad countenance, and sharply rebuked him for his unfaithfulness to his engagement. Henry excused himself by saying that he had often prayed for him with great fervor, and had even offered up for him many penitential works. "Oh, brother !" exclaimed the soul, "blood, blood is necessary to give me some relief

and refreshment in my excruciating torments. Your penitential works, severe as they are, cannot deliver me. Nothing can do this but the blood of Jesus Christ, which is offered up in the sacrifice of the Mass. Masses, Masses, these are what I need !”

In the time of St. Bernard, a monk of Clairvaux appeared after his death to his brethren in religion, to thank them for having delivered him from purgatory. On being asked what had most contributed to free him from his torments, he led the inquirer to the Church, where a priest was saying Mass. “Look,” said he, “this is the means by which my deliverance has been effected ; this is the power of God’s mercy ; this is the salutary sacrifice which takes away the sins of the world.”

FIFTH MEANS.—*Children proclaim the Real Presence.*

We read in the Gospel that our Saviour one day performed most wonderful things. When the chief priests and scribes saw these wonders they were filled with indignation. What excited their rage most was, that the children cried aloud in the temple, saying : “ Hosanna to the Son of David ! ’ that is, to Jesus Christ. And they said to our Lord : “ Hearest thou what these say ? ” And Jesus said to them : “ Yea, have you never read : ‘ Out of the mouths of infants and of sucklings thou hast perfected praise.’ ” (Matt. xxi., 15, 16.) What happened then, happens still. Many non-Catholics are filled with indignation when we speak to them of the wonders that Jesus wrought—when we speak of the institution of the Mass, of the real presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. But Jesus knows how to inspire even little children to proclaim his real presence and confound the unbeliever.



A Calvinist nobleman was once disputing about the real presence, with the father of St. Jane Frances de Chantal; Frances was at that time only five years of age. Whilst the dispute was going on she advanced and said to the nobleman. "What, sir! do you not believe that Jesus Christ is really present in the Blessed Sacrament, and yet he has told us that *he is present*? You then make him a liar. If you dared attack the honor of the king, my father would defend it at the risk of his life, and even at the cost of yours; what have you then to expect from God for calling his Son a liar? The Calvinist was greatly surprised at the child's zeal, and endeavored to appease his young adversary with presents, but full of love for her holy faith, she took his gifts and threw them into the fire, saying: "Thus shall all those burn in hell who do not believe the words of Jesus Christ!"

SIXTH MEANS.—*Satan proclaims the Real Presence.*

It was not enough for Protestants to deny the real presence of our dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament; they committed even the most abominable outrages on his sacred person in this mystery of love. In France, particularly, the Calvinists entered the Catholic churches, overturned the altars, trampled the Blessed Sacrament under foot, drank out of the consecrated chalices, smeared their shoes with holy oil, defiled the church vestments with filth, threw the sacred books into the fire, and destroyed the statuary. They assaulted and massacred the Catholic clergy while in the discharge of their sacred functions, with cries of "kill the priests," "kill the monks." In France alone, the Calvinists destroyed 20,000 Catholic churches. They pillaged and demolished monasteries and hospitals. The

monks at Chartres were all murdered with the exception of one, who concealed himself; but as soon as discovered, he was buried alive. In Dauphiny alone they murdered 255 priests, 112 monks and friars, and burned 900 towns and villages.

Those were trying times for the Catholics in other countries as well as in France. Although the bishops and priests did all in their power to strengthen their flocks in the faith, yet it required an extraordinary miracle to confirm the faith of the believers and to confound the impiety of the heretics. This miracle was wrought by Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament at Laon in France, on the eighth day of February, 1566.

It is indeed a remarkable fact that, as the devil made use of Luther, an apostate-monk, to abolish the Mass and deny the real presence, in like manner God made use of his arch-enemy, the devil, to prove the real presence. He repeatedly forced him publicly to profess his firm belief in it, to confound the heretics for their disbelief, and acknowledge himself vanquished by our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. For this purpose God allowed a certain Mme. Nicola Aubry, an innocent person, to become possessed by Beelzebub and twenty-nine other evil spirits. The possession took place on the eighth of November, 1565, and lasted until the eighth of February, 1566.

Her parents took her to Father de Motta, a pious priest of Vervins, in order that he might expel the demon by the exorcisms of the Church. Father de Motta tried several times to expel the evil spirit by applying the sacred relics of the holy cross, but he could not succeed; Satan would not depart. At last, inspired by the Holy Ghost, he resolved to expel the devil by means of the sacrament

of our Lord's body and blood. Whilst Nicola was lying in a state of unnatural lethargy, Father de Motta placed the Blessed Sacrament upon her lips, and instantly the infernal spell was broken; Nicola was restored to consciousness, and received holy communion with every mark of devotion. As soon as Nicola had received the sacred body of our Lord, her face became bright and beautiful as the face of an angel, and all who saw her were filled with joy and wonder, and they blessed God from their inmost hearts.

With the permission of God, Satan returned and again took possession of Nicola.

As the strange circumstances of Nicola's possession became known everywhere, several Calvinist preachers came with their followers, to "expose this popish cheat," as they said. On their entrance, the devil saluted them mockingly, called them by name, and told them that they had come in *obedience to him*. One of the preachers took his Protestant prayer-book, and began to read it with a very solemn face. The devil laughed at him, and, putting on a most comical look, he said: "Ho! ho! my good friend; do you intend to expel *me* with your prayers and hymns? Do you think that they will cause me any pain? Don't you know that they are mine? *I* helped to compose them!"

"I will expel thee in the name of God," said the preacher, solemnly.

"You!" said the devil, mockingly. "You will *not* expel me either in the name of *God*, or in the name of the *devil*. Did you ever hear of one devil driving out another?"

"I am not a devil," said the preacher, angrily, "I am a servant of Christ."

“A servant of Christ, indeed!” said Satan, with a sneer. “What! I tell you you are worse than *I* am. *I* believe, and *you* do not want to believe. Do you suppose that *you* can expel me from the body of this miserable wretch? Ha! go first and expel all the devils that are in your own heart!”

The preacher took his leave, somewhat discomfited. On going away, he said, turning up the whites of his eyes, “O Lord, I pray thee, assist this poor creature!”

“And I pray Lucifer,” cried the evil spirit, “that he may never leave you, but may always keep you firmly in his power, as he does now. Go about your business, now. You are *all mine*, and I am your master.”

On the arrival of the priest, several of the Protestants went away—they had seen and heard more than they wanted. Others, however, remained; and great was their terror when they saw how the devil writhed and howled in agony, as soon as the Blessed Sacrament was brought near him. At last the evil spirit departed, leaving Nicola in a state of unnatural trance. While she was in this state, several of the preachers tried to open her eyes, but they found it impossible to do so. The priest then placed the Blessed Sacrament on Nicola’s lips, and instantly she was restored to consciousness.

Rev. Father de Motta then turned to the astonished preachers, and said: “Go now, ye preachers of the new Gospel; go and relate everywhere what you have seen and heard. Do not deny any longer that our Lord Jesus Christ is really and truly present in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar. Go now, and let not human respect hinder you from confessing the truth.”

During the exorcisms of the following days, the devil was forced to confess that he was not to be expelled at



Vervins, and that he had with him twenty-nine devils, among whom were three powerful demons : Cerberus, Astaroth, and Legio.

On the third of January, 1556, the bishop arrived at Vervins, and began the exorcism in the church, in presence of an immense multitude.

“I command thee, in the name and by power of the real presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, to depart instantly,” said the bishop to Satan in a solemn voice.

Satan was, at last, expelled the second time by means of the Blessed Sacrament. On leaving, he paralyzed the left arm and the right foot of Nicola, and also made her left arm longer than her right ; and no power on earth could cure this strange infirmity, until some weeks after, when the devil was at last completely and irrevocably expelled.

Nicola was now taken to the celebrated pilgrimage of our Lady at Liesse, especially since the devil seemed to fear that place so much.

Next day Father de Motta began the exorcism in the church of our Lady at Liesse, in presence of an immense multitude.

He took the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, and, showing it to the demon, he said : “I command thee, in the name of the living God, the great Emmanuel whom thou seest here present, and in whom thou believest——”

“Ah, yes !” shrieked the demon, “*I believe in him.*” And the devil howled again as he made this confession, for it was wrung from him by the power of Almighty God.

“I command thee, then, in his name,” said the priest, “to quit this body instantly.”

At these words, and especially at the sight of the Blessed Sacrament, the devil suffered the most frightful torture.

At one moment the body of Nicola was rolled up like a ball ; then again she became fearfully swollen. At one time her face was unnaturally lengthened, then excessively widened, and sometimes it was as red as scarlet. Her eyes, at times, protruded horribly, and then again sunk deeply into her skull. Her tongue hung down to her chin ; it was sometimes black, sometimes red, and sometimes spotted like a toad.

The priest still continued to urge and torture Satan. "Accursed spirit !" he cried, "I command thee, in the name and by the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ here in the Blessed Sacrament, to depart instantly from the body of this poor creature."

"Ah, yes !" cried Satan, howling wildly, "twenty-six of my companions shall leave this instant, for they are forced to do so."

The people in the church now began to pray with great fervor. Suddenly Nicola's limbs began to crack, as if every bone in her body were breaking, a pestilential vapor came forth from her mouth, and twenty-six devils departed from her, never more to return.

Nicola then fell into an unnatural swoon, from which she was roused only by the Blessed Sacrament. On recovering her senses, and receiving holy communion, Nicola's face shone like the face of an angel.

The priest still continued to urge the demon, and used every means to expel him.

"I will not leave, unless commanded by the bishop of Laon," answered the demon, angrily.

Nicola was now taken to Pierrepont, where one of the demons, named Legio, was expelled by means of the Blessed Sacrament.

Next morning Nicola was brought to the church. Scarcely had she quitted the house, when the devil again took possession of her.

The bishop who was requested to exorcise Nicola, prepared himself for this terrible task by prayer and fasting, and other works of penance.

On the arrival of Nicola in the Church, the exorcism began.

"How many are you in this body?" asked the bishop.

"There are three of us," answered the evil spirit.

"What are your names?"

"Beelzebub, Cerberus, and Astaroth."

"What has become of the others?" asked the bishop.

"They have been expelled," answered Satan.

"Who expelled them?"

"Ha!" cried the devil, gnashing his teeth, "it was *He* whom you hold in your hand, there on the paten." The devil meant our dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

The bishop then held the Blessed Sacrament near the face of Nicola. The demon writhed and howled in agony. "Ah, yes! I will go, I will go!" he shrieked, "but I shall return."

Suddenly Nicola became stiff and motionless as marble. The bishop then touched her lips with the Blessed Sacrament, and in an instant she was fully restored to consciousness. She received holy communion, and her countenance now shone with a wondrous, supernatural beauty.

Next day Nicola was brought again to the Church, and the exorcism began as usual.

The bishop took the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, held it near the face of Nicola, and said:

"I command thee in the name of the living God, and by the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ here in the

sacrament of the altar, to depart instantly from the body of this creature of God, and never more to return."

"No! no!" shrieked the devil, "I will not go. My hour is not yet come."

"I command thee to depart. Go forth, impure, accursed spirit! Go forth!" and the bishop held the Blessed Sacrament close to Nicola's face.

"Stop! stop!" shrieked Satan; "let me go! I will depart—but I shall return." And instantly Nicola fell into the most frightful convulsions. A black smoke was seen issuing from her mouth, and she fell again into a swoon.

During her stay in Laon, Nicola was carefully examined by Catholic and Protestant physicians. Her left arm, which had been paralyzed by the devil, was found entirely without feeling. The doctors cut into the arm with a sharp knife, they burnt it with fire, they drove pins and needles under the nails of the fingers, but Nicola felt no pain; her arm was utterly insensible. Once, while Nicola was lying in a state of unnatural lethargy, the doctors gave her some bread soaked in wine, (it was what the Protestants call their communion, or Lord's Supper,) they rubbed her limbs briskly, they threw water in her face, they pierced her tongue till the blood flowed; they tried every possible means to arouse her, but in vain! Nicola remained cold and motionless as marble. At last the priest touched the lips of Nicola with the Blessed Sacrament, and instantly she was restored to consciousness, and began to praise God.

The miracle was so clear, so palpable, that one of the doctors, who was a bigoted Calvinist, immediately renounced his errors, and became a Catholic.



Several times, also, the Protestants touched Nicola's face with a host which was not consecrated, and which, consequently, was only bread, but Satan was not in the least tormented by this. He only ridiculed their efforts.

On the twenty-seventh of January, the bishop, after having walked in solemn procession with the clergy and the faithful, began the exorcism in church, in presence of a vast multitude of Protestants and Catholics.

The bishop now held the Blessed Sacrament close to the face of Nicola. Suddenly a wild, unearthly yell rings through the air—a black, heavy smoke issues from the mouth of Nicola. The demon Astaroth is expelled forever.

During the exorcism which took place on the first of February, the bishop said :

“O accursed spirit! since neither prayer, nor the holy gospels, neither the exorcisms of the Church, nor the holy relics, can compel thee to depart, I will now show thee thy Lord and Master, and by his power I command thee.”

During the exorcism, which took place after Mass, the bishop held the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, and said : “O accursed spirit, arch-enemy of the ever-blessed God! I command thee, by the precious blood of Jesus Christ here present, to depart from this poor woman! Depart accursed, into the everlasting flames of hell!”

At these words, and especially at the sight of the Blessed Sacrament, the demon was so fearfully tormented, and the appearance of Nicola was so hideous and revolting, that the people turned away their eyes in horror. At last a heavy sigh was heard, and a cloud of black smoke issued from the mouth of Nicola. Cerberus was expelled.

Again Nicola fell into a death-like swoon, and again she was brought to consciousness only by means of the Blessed Sacrament.

During the exorcism which took place on the seventh day of February, the bishop said to Satan :

“Tell me, why hast thou taken possession of this honest and virtuous Catholic woman ? ”

“I have done so by permission of God. I have taken possession of her on account of the sins of the people. I have done it to show my Calvinists that there are devils who can take possession of man whenever God permits it. I know they do not want to believe this ; but I will show them that I am the devil. I have taken possession of this creature in order to convert them, or to harden them in their sins ; and, by the sacred blood, I will *perform* my task.”

This answer filled all who heard it with horror. “Yes,” answered the bishop, solemnly, “God desires to unite all men in the one holy faith. As there is but one God, so there can be but one true religion. A religion like that which the Protestants have invented, is but a hollow mockery. It must fall. The religion established by our Lord Jesus Christ is the only true one ; it alone shall last forever. It is destined to unite all men within its sacred embrace, so that there shall be but one sheep-fold and one shepherd. This divine Shepherd is our Lord Jesus Christ, the invisible head of the holy Roman Catholic Church, whose visible head is our holy Father the Pope, successor of St. Peter.”

The devil was silent—he was put to shame before the entire multitude. He was expelled once more by means of the Blessed Sacrament.

In the afternoon of the same day the devil began to cry : “Ah ! ha ! you think that you can expel me in this

way. You have not the proper attendance of a bishop. Where are the dean and the archdean? Where are the royal judges? Where is the chief magistrate, who was frightened out of his wits that night, in the prison? Where is the procurator of the king? Where are his attorneys and counsellors? Where is the clerk of the court?" (The devil mentioned each of these by name.) "I will not depart until all are assembled. Were I to depart now, what proof could you give to the king of all that has happened? Do you think that people will believe you so easily? No! no! There are many who would make objections. The testimony of these common country-people here will have but little weight. It is a torment to me that I must tell you what you have to do. I am forced to do it. Ha! cursed be the hour in which I first took possession of this vile wretch."

"I find little pleasure in thy prating," answered the bishop; "there are witnesses enough here. Those whom you have mentioned are not necessary. Depart! then; give glory to God. Depart—go to the flames of hell!"

"Yes, I shall depart, but not to-day. I know full well that I must depart. My sentence is passed; I am compelled to leave."

"I care not for thy jabbering," said the bishop, "I shall expel thee by the power of God: by the precious blood of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Yes, I must yield to you," shrieked the demon wildly. "It tortures me that I must give you this honor."

The bishop now took the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, and held it close to the face of the possessed woman.

At last, Satan was compelled to flee once more.

The next morning, after the procession was ended, the holy sacrifice of the Mass was offered up as usual.

During the consecration, the possessed woman was twice raised over six feet into the air, and then fell back heavily upon the platform. As the bishop, just before the *Pater Noster*, took the sacred host once more in his hand, and raised it with the chalice, the possessed woman was again whisked into the air, carrying with her the keepers, fifteen in number, at least six feet above the platform; and, after a while, she fell heavily back on the ground.

At this sight, all present were filled with amazement and terror. A German Protestant named Voske fell on his knees; he burst into tears,—he was converted.

“Ah!” cried he, “I now believe firmly that the devil really possesses this poor creature. I believe that it is really the body and blood of Jesus Christ which expels him. I believe firmly. I will no longer remain a Protestant.”

After Mass, the exorcism began as usual.

“Now, at last,” said the bishop, “thou must depart. Away with thee, evil spirit!”

“Yes,” said Satan, “it is true that I must depart, but not yet. I will not go before the hour is come in which I first took possession of this wretched creature.”

At last the bishop took the sacred host in his hand, and said: “In the name of the adorable Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—in the name of the sacred body of Jesus Christ here present—I command thee, wicked spirit, to depart.

“Yes, yes, it is true!” shrieked the demon wildly; “it is true. It is the body of God. I must confess it, for I am forced to do so. Ha! it tortures me that I must confess this; but I must. I speak the truth only when I am forced to do it. The truth is not from me. It comes from my Lord and Master. I have entered this body by the permission of God.”



The bishop now held the Blessed Sacrament close to the face of the possessed woman. The demon writhed in fearful agony. He tried in every way to escape from the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

At length a black smoke was seen issuing from the mouth of Nicola. She fell into a swoon, and was restored again to consciousness only by means of the Blessed Sacrament.

The eighth of February, the day appointed by God on which Satan was to leave Nicola forever, arrived at last. After the solemn procession, the bishop began the last exorcism.

"I shall not ask thee any longer," said the bishop to Satan, "when thou intendest to leave; I will expel thee instantly by the power of the living God, and by the precious body and blood of Jesus Christ, his beloved Son, here present in the sacrament of the altar."

"Ha, yes!" shrieked the demon; "I confess that the Son of God is here really and truly present. He is my Lord and Master. It tortures me to confess it, but I am forced to do so." Then he repeated several times, with a wild, unearthly howl: "Yes, it is true. I must confess it. I am forced to leave, by the power of God's body here present. I must—I must depart. It torments me that I must go so soon, and that I must confess this truth. But this truth is not from me; it comes from my Lord and Master, who has sent me hither, and who commands and compels me to confess the truth publicly."

The bishop then took the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, and, holding it on high, he said, with a solemn voice: "O thou wicked, unclean spirit, Beelzebub! thou arch-enemy of the eternal God! behold, here present, the precious body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, thy Lord and

Master ! I adjure thee, in the name and by the power of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who is here present ; I command thee to depart instantly and forever from this creature of God. Depart to the deepest depth of hell, there to be tormented forever. Go forth, unclean spirit, go forth—behold here thy Lord and Master ! ”

At these solemn words, and at the sight of our sacramental Lord, the poor possessed woman writhed fearfully. Her limbs cracked as if every bone in her body were breaking. The fifteen strong men who held her, could scarcely keep her back. They staggered from side to side, they were covered with perspiration. Satan tried to escape from the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. The mouth of Nicola was wide open, her tongue hung down below her chin, her face was shockingly swollen and distorted. Her color changed from yellow to green, and became even grey and blue, so that she no longer looked like a human being ; it was rather the face of a hideous, incarnate demon. All present trembled with terror, especially when they heard the wild cry of the demon, which sounded like the loud roar of a wild bull.

They fell on their knees, and with tears in their eyes, began to cry out : “ Jesus, have mercy ! ”

The bishop continued to urge Satan. At last the evil spirit departed, and Nicola fell back senseless into the arms of her keepers. She still, however, remained shockingly distorted. In this state she was shown to the judges, and to all the people present ; she was rolled up like a ball. The bishop now fell on his knees, in order to give her the Blessed Sacrament as usual. But see ! suddenly the demon returns, wild with rage, endeavors to seize the hand

of the bishop, and even tries to grasp the Blessed Sacrament itself. The bishop starts back—Nicola is carried into the air and the bishop rises from his knees, trembling with terror and pale as death.

The good bishop takes courage again ; he pursues the demon, holding the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, till at length the demon, overcome by the power of our Lord's sacred body, goes forth amidst smoke, and lightning, and thunder.

Thus was the demon at length expelled forever, on Friday afternoon, at three o'clock, the same day and hour on which our Lord triumphed over hell by his ever-blessed death.

Nicola was now completely cured ; she could move her left arm with the greatest ease. She fell on her knees, and thanked God, as well as the good bishop, for all he had done for her.

The people wept for joy, and sang hymns of praise and thanksgiving in honor of our dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

On all sides were heard the exclamations : " Oh, what a great miracle ! Oh, thank God that I witnessed it ! Who is there now that can doubt of the real presence of our Lord Jesus Christ in the sacrament of the altar ! "

Many a Protestant also said : " I believe now in the presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament ; I have seen with my eyes ! I will remain a Calvinist no longer. Accursed be those who have hitherto kept me in error ! Oh, now I can understand what a good thing is the holy sacrifice of the Mass ! "

A solemn *Te Deum* was intoned ; the organ pealed forth, and the bells rung a merry chime.

The whole city was filled with joy.

This great triumph of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament over Satan occurred in the presence of more than 150,000 people, in the presence of all the ecclesiastical and civil authorities of the city, of Protestants and Catholics alike. I have published a lengthy account of this extraordinary affair in a little volume entitled, "Triumph of the Blessed Sacrament." These facts are well-authenticated by the accounts published in various languages—French, Italian, Spanish and German, as I have shown on pages 13, 14 and 15 of above-named little volume.

SEVENTH MEANS.—*Miraculous Hosts proclaim the Real Presence.*

When Jesus was loaded with infamy and tortured with pain, when he had almost lost the semblance of man, he knew how to prove to the world his divinity; it was then that he made all nature speak and testify to his innocence. The earth shrouded itself with the dark pall of mourning; the rocks burst asunder; the sun veiled its face, and even the very dead arose from their graves to bear witness to the divinity of the dying Jesus. "Now the centurion and they that were with him watching, having seen the earthquake and other things that were done, were sore afraid, saying: 'Indeed this was the Son of God.'" (Matt. xxvii., 54.) So when we look upon the sacred host, it is true, we see there no mark of his majesty, no token of his sacred presence, no vestige of his perfections, not a single ray of his divinity. Yet, for all that, Jesus does not lack the power and means to manifest himself in the sacred host, as the Lord of heaven and earth and the Redeemer of the world. Our dear Saviour has indeed been pleased, on



hundreds of occasions, to manifest his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament in a most striking manner.

There exist a great number of hosts which are called miraculous, because of the wonderful facts connected with them. The history of that of Augsburg, in Germany, is one of the most celebrated and most authentic. In 1194, a certain woman went to receive holy communion, in the Church of the Holy Cross, in Augsburg. Immediately after receiving, she took the sacred host and put it between two slices of wax and thus kept it for five years. During all that time she suffered the most excruciating mental torments. To rid herself of her remorse of conscience, she at length took the Blessed Sacrament to Father Berthold, a pious priest, the prior of the Convent of the Holy Cross, declared to him her great crime and expressed her readiness to perform any penance he thought fit to impose upon her. The good priest consoled and encouraged the truly penitent woman to hope in the mercy of God. On taking the two pieces of wax apart, he beheld, instead of the species of bread, human flesh and even the muscular fibres. When he tried to detach the wax from both sides of the host, the better to contemplate the Blessed Sacrament, the sacred host split at once in two, so as to remain, however, attached to the wax and united by the muscular fibres. Almost beside himself at this wonderful occurrence, he was at a loss whether he should keep it secret or make it public. After mature reflection he concluded to consult several men of discretion on the subject. He was advised to put the wax with the host in a sealed box and keep it until the bishop of Augsburg should have given his decision on the matter.

On learning this miraculous event, Udalskalk, then bishop of Augsburg, was greatly amazed. He went imme-

diately with his clergy and a large number of the laity to the Church of the Holy Cross and, in solemn procession, carried the sacred host, with the wax, to his cathedral. After the wax had been taken off they were surprised to see that the host had become three times thicker than it was before. From this time to the feast of St. John the Baptist the sacred host used to increase in thickness, especially during Mass, to such an extent that the wax came off by itself without any human intervention.

Bishop Udalskalk, convinced of the truth of the miracle, put the wax with the Blessed Sacrament, which kept the appearance of human flesh, in a crystal vase and carried it again in solemn procession to the Church of the Holy Cross, where it has been preserved with the greatest reverence to the present day. Every year, processions, numbering from twenty to thirty thousand men, come to this church to adore our Lord in this miraculous host.

It could scarcely be expected that such an event should escape contradiction. In 1486, Leonard Stunz, a priest of the cathedral, called the miracle in question. He ascended the pulpit several times and most vehemently inveighed against the devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, maintaining "that all that had been said about this host was but a fiction, and the story of an old devotee." The people felt highly indignant at him, whilst all unbelievers applauded what he had said. As soon as Frederick III, then bishop of Augsburg, heard of the scandal, he ordered this priest to leave the city, withdrew the sacred host from public veneration, and kept it under lock and key in a wooden box until it had been examined anew. Just about this time Henry Justitutoris, the papal legate, came to Augsburg. The bishop showed him the miraculous host and related to

him all that had happened. At the request of the bishop, the papal legate examined the sacred host, after which he wrote a learned dissertation on the subject, showing that the Blessed Sacrament is still a real sacrament, containing the body of our Lord, even though the species of bread should disappear, and, instead, human flesh and blood should become visible. This he wrote against Leonard Stunz, who had maintained that the sacred host should no longer be worshipped, since, instead of the appearance of bread, human flesh could be distinctly seen.

The legate and bishop then referred the matter to the learned professors of the celebrated universities of Ingolstadt and Erfurt, who unanimously declared that the sacred host in the Church of the Holy Cross in Augsburg was the Blessed Sacrament, and should as such be venerated and adored. After this, the bishop again examined the sacred host, in presence of his clergy and other learned men. They distinctly saw human flesh as before, as indeed it may be seen even to the present day. The result of this examination and the declaration of both universities were forthwith announced from the pulpit, and the miraculous host was again, to the great joy of the people, exposed on the altar for public veneration and adoration. From that time thousands of pilgrims flocked to the Church of the Holy Cross to worship our Lord in the miraculous host. The number of pious pilgrims, however, considerably increased in proportion as the extraordinary favors which our Lord in the miraculous host bestowed on the pious worshippers, became more generally known. I will here relate three of those extraordinary favors, for the edification of the pious reader.

In 1611, Mary Maximiliana, sister of William V., duke of Bavaria, was taken sick with an acute pain in her chest.

The physicians had tried every remedy to procure her some relief, but in vain. One day the duke happened to speak to his sister, of the great miracles wrought by our Lord in the miraculous host in the Church of the Holy Cross at Augsburg. On hearing the account of these wonders, Mary Maximiliana conceived great confidence in our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. She dismissed her physicians and caused herself to be carried from Munich to the Church of the Holy Cross in Augsburg, where she asked our Lord in the miraculous host to cure her. Her prayer was immediately granted. She rose up, unaided by any one, perfectly cured. To show her gratitude to our Lord, she had this miracle announced in all the Catholic churches of Bavaria, and requested the clergy and the people to join her in giving thanks to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, for her miraculous cure.

In 1620, Bartholomew Holzhauser, a great servant of God, was attacked by the pestilence which then raged in Augsburg. He had recourse to our Lord in the miraculous host and was delivered from the epidemic.

In 1747, a poor man in Augsburg who had been dumb from his very infancy, and was known by all in the city, prayed several times to our Lord in the wonderful host to obtain the gift of speech, but apparently without being heard. One day, however, he prayed with unusual confidence, and with tears in his eyes, to obtain the same favor. This time his request was granted. Full of joy he ran home to make known the miracle our Lord had wrought in him.

After the bishop had sufficiently convinced himself of the miraculous fact, he had a solemn *Te Deum* chanted, and all the bells of the churches rang out in thanksgiving.



The miraculous host has often been examined since, and every new examination furnishes new proofs of the real presence. All the bishops of Augsburg, to the present day, have venerated and adored our Lord therein, thus forming a chain of the most trustworthy witnesses. But the faithful, too, have been most anxious to pay their homage to our Lord in this miraculous host. Up to the present time their devotion to him has not diminished, in spite of all the impious clamors of infidelity. (Ott's Eucharisticum.)

EIGHTH MEANS.—*Supernatural Favors proclaim the Real Presence.*

If we pray to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament and obtain the favors we ask, it is a clear proof that Jesus is there present, for no favor can come from a piece of bread.

Now there are, on record, numberless favors granted by Jesus Christ to those who prayed to him in the Blessed Sacrament. Cardinal de Noailles, archbishop of Paris, relates in his pastoral of August 10th, 1725, the following cure of Mme. Anne de la Fosse, which took place on the feast of Corpus Christi in 1725. This lady had been suffering for twenty years from an incurable issue of blood. So weak had she become, that she was no longer able to walk even with the aid of crutches; nay, it very often happened that she fainted from sheer exhaustion. Many a time she was compelled to leave her bed, on account of acute pains in her side; and when out of bed, she had to be carried from one place to another. Sixty most trustworthy witnesses testified to the fact that Anne de la Fosse was in the pitiable condition mentioned at the approach of the feast of Corpus Christi. About this very time she felt

strongly inspired to beseech our Lord to cure her when the Blessed Sacrament would be carried past her house in the solemn procession of Corpus Christi. She was taken down and placed before the door of her house, where she patiently waited and most fervently prayed until our Lord was carried by. On being told, "Behold there is the Blessed Sacrament," she knelt down to adore, and, being too weak to remain in a kneeling posture, she threw herself on the ground and cried in a loud voice, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst cure me, for I believe that in the Blessed Sacrament there is the same Lord present who one day entered triumphantly into Jerusalem: forgive me my sins, and I shall be cured." Then she tried to advance with the procession by dragging herself on her hands and knees, constantly crying aloud, "My Lord Jesus Christ, if thou wilt, thou canst cure me." Many of the people were greatly astonished at her behavior, whilst others thought she was drunk or crazy. The people told her to go back and keep silence; but she would not be intimidated or silenced, but continued crawling after our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, saying, "Let me follow my Lord and my God." This great faith of hers could not go unrewarded. On a sudden she felt strength increasing in her limbs. She rose up, but fearing she might not be strong enough to walk to the church, she cried still louder than before, "Lord, let me enter thy temple, and I shall be cured." She now requested her two companions to allow her to walk without their assistance, and, to the great astonishment of all present, she walked unsupported to the parish church, whither the Blessed Sacrament was being carried. As soon as she entered the church, she felt perfectly cured of the issue of blood, and so strong as to walk about with

ease. After spending a considerable time in thanking, praising, and blessing our Lord Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist for the immense benefit he had bestowed upon her, she returned home accompanied by a great crowd of people. Many who had witnessed her intense suffering for years came now to behold the great miracle which Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament had wrought on her. To make sure that she was perfectly cured, they requested her to walk up and down in their presence, which she did with the greatest delight, in order thus to give honor, and glory, and thanks, to her divine Benefactor in the Blessed Eucharist. Even many non-Catholics there were who praised God for this great miracle. One of them, who had often visited her when she was so very sick, and who knew in what a pitiable condition she had been, testified on oath that this cure was the wonderful effect of God's power, and that, according to his opinion, there could be no miracle more authentic than this. (Le Brun, "Explication des prières et des cérémonies de la Messe," tom 3.)

Maximilian I., emperor of Austria, having ascended the steep mountains in the neighborhood of Innsbruck to so great a height that he could neither venture to descend again, nor could any one come to his aid, cried out to the people below to bring the Blessed Sacrament as near to him as possible, in order (as in his great peril he was unable to receive it) that he might at least honor it as well as he could by adoring it and recommending himself to Jesus Christ from the rock above. Accordingly, the Blessed Sacrament is carried thither; the emperor adores it with most profound respect and great devotion, and implores Jesus Christ to help him. What happens? No sooner has the emperor commenced to pray to Jesus in

the Blessed Sacrament, than he sees a beautiful youth behind him, probably his guardian angel, who leads him safely down among the rocks, by a path hitherto unperceived, and when the emperor wishes to reward him, he suddenly disappears. (Dauroltius c. 3. tit. 37.)

St. Peter, of Alcantara, one day, seeing his brethren in religion destitute of bread, and without the means of procuring it, ordered them to go and pray before the Blessed Sacrament. No sooner had they done so, than the bell was rung at the door, and the janitor, on opening the door, instead of seeing some person there, as he expected, found a large basket of white bread, which Jesus Christ had sent to them, probably, by his angels.

We read in the life St. Francis de Sales that nine hundred Protestants presented themselves to him to abjure their heresy after he had prayed with the faithful during the forty hours' devotion. A few days after, having prayed with the people most humbly and fervently for the same object, a great many heretics of the suburbs of Focigni came to abjure their heresy. Their example was followed by three hundred more of the parish of Belvaux, and three hundred of the parish of St. Sergues.

The following miracle is introduced to us under the double warranty, so to speak, of the curé of St. Martin at Metz, who narrates it, and the bishop of Metz, who indorses the narrative, with his imprimatur, in the following words :

"BISHOP'S PALACE, METZ.

"Having considered the following narrative to be as edifying as we know it to be strictly conformable to truth, we have approved of its publication. It is scarcely possible to imagine anything more likely to awaken in the



hearts of Christians earnest sentiments of faith, trust, and love for our Lord Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament of the altar, and to increase amongst us devotion to the Institution of the Perpetual Adoration, than this simple recital of what took place in the Church of St. Martin during the religious services of the forty hours' devotion. It would seem as if our blessed Lord had wished to show by a signal favor how acceptable is this homage to his divine heart, and had chosen for that purpose the sudden and miraculous cure of a young girl whose faith had led her to fall at his feet, and to cry out with lively faith and humble confidence, 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me whole!'

"METZ, 8th September, 1865.

✠ PAUL, *Bishop of Metz.*"

The statement of the curé carries conviction to every candid reader by the truthful simplicity of its style. Ann Clery, daughter of a distinguished member of the magistracy, still living, was sent to school at the Convent of the Sacred Heart at Metz, at the age of thirteen. Soon after she went to school, her health gradually declined, and after several serious attacks, her malady assumed the form of the disease which her Paris physician described as "muscular and atrophical paralysis." For more than nine years she lingered in a state of infirmity, pronounced by one doctor after another as incurable. In 1859, her physician declared that she would be a cripple as long as she lived.

"From that time—that is, from the middle of the year 1859 up to the present time—Mdlle. de Clery was not attended by any physician. Her mother alone watched over her health. Her infirmities kept on increasing. She could hardly digest any food. Her thinness and weakness

were pitiable. Violent headaches, three or four times a week, added to her prostration. She could not be laid on the bed or the couch without suffering intense pain; and at such moments the effect of her paroxysms was visible in her face. Her eyelids became inflamed and of a purple color; this gave to her countenance an indescribable appearance of suffering. Paralysis was now beginning to affect even her arms. It was feared that she would soon lose the principal means of occupation and amusement within her reach—the exercise of her skill in fancy work. The future prospects of this young lady seemed sad indeed; but the time was at hand which God, in his wisdom, had fixed upon for the fulfilment of his merciful designs.”

Her resignation to God’s will was most complete. During several years a priest brought her holy communion every week, and she spent her time in embroidering altar-cloths or making artificial flowers for Corpus Christi.

She felt a great longing to be carried to the Church of St. Martin, for the forty hours’ devotion which was to take place on the 12th, 13th, and 14th of June. The state of her health prevented the accomplishment of her wishes until the third day.

“On the morning of the 14th of June, Ann received communion in bed. At twelve o’clock, which was the hour of adoration assigned by the parochial regulations to the inhabitants of the street in which the Hotel Coetlosquet is situated, she was carried to the church—she, a woman of twenty-three years of age—like a baby of a few months, by her maid Clementine, who sat down on a bench on the left side of the nave and held her on her knees. Madame de Clery and Mdlle. Therese de Coetlosquet knelt, the one by her side, and the other on the bench behind, in

order, as much as possible, to screen her from observation. Madame and Mdlle. Pauline de Coetlosquet, who had preceded them, were kneeling in another part of the church. Neither the invalid herself nor any of her friends were expecting the extraordinary event about to take place.

"After a few moments' rest from the fatigue she had gone through, and which was producing, as usual, a purple flush in her eyelids, Ann fixed her attention on the Blessed Sacrament, and, after a short silent adoration, she said the prayer she often used at the moment of communion: 'Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst cure me.' At the same instant she felt so violent a pain through her whole body that it was with the utmost difficulty she could keep from screaming. She prayed earnestly for strength to bear this pain, and then said: 'My God, if it is thy will that I should be carried back to my sick-bed, give me grace at least to be always resigned to thy holy will.' I cannot describe what then happened between God and her soul. She says she felt penetrated with faith and hope, and, as she expresses it, became conscious that she was cured. She wanted to kneel. Her maid whispered to her: 'Mademoiselle, you will fall down.' But Ann threw herself on her knees, and said to those around her: 'Pray, pray; I am cured!' These words filled them with astonishment; tears and sobs mingled with their prayers. Madame de Clery, overwhelmed with emotion, and not knowing what to think or to believe, led her daughter out of the church. She could not credit the evidence of her senses when she saw her daughter standing on her feet, and then walking with only the help of her arm. They went into a summer-house in the adjacent garden, and there the poor mother, whose fears made her incredulous, ascertained that

the knots under her daughter's knees had entirely disappeared. Ann entreated her mother to allow her to return to the church, where she remained for three-quarters of an hour kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament, without feeling in the least fatigued, pouring forth thanks and praises to God.

“When I was told what had happened, I went to the summer-house. I could only look at Ann in silence and astonishment, whilst, with intense gratitude to God, she showed me how she could stretch out her limbs, walk, kneel, and hold up her head without difficulty. She was completely cured. God had done the work; and his work, accomplished in an instant, was perfect. All the ailments which had afflicted her disappeared at the same time as the paralysis. Moreover, she was entirely freed from the weakness which always follows long illness. Numerous facts proved this. The hour of Vespers was at hand. Ann said she wished to be present at the service. Following the dictates of natural prudence—for I was not certain how far, in restoring her health, God had given back to her her strength also—I advised her to rest; or, at least, if she was bent on returning to the church that day, to wait in the summer-house till the time of Benediction. She complied with my request; but when the hymn *Pange Lingua*, etc., resounded in her ears—‘Sing, my soul, the mystery of the glorious body of Christ’—she could not sit still, but hastened to join the crowd which filled the church.

“The next day, which was the feast of Corpus Christi, she heard a Mass in thanksgiving, and went to communion, kneeling at the altar amongst the other communicants—a happiness she had not enjoyed for nine years.



She was present during the whole of the High Mass, which is celebrated, every Thursday, in honor of the Blessed Sacrament, and in the afternoon was again in the church, kneeling before the altar and pouring forth the expressions of her ardent thankfulness. Three days after—that is, on the Sunday within the octave—Ann spent seven hours in presence of the Blessed Sacrament, visiting our Lord, hearing Mass, and assisting at Benediction. When urged to moderate her devotion lest too much kneeling might fatigue her, she replied that, far from feeling the least fatigue, she experienced an increase of strength and vitality whenever she approached our blessed Lord.” Most assuredly such miracles are wrought, not by a piece of bread, but by Jesus Christ himself who is present under the appearance of bread.

NINTH MEANS.—*Divine Chastisements proclaim the Real Presence.*

It has never been known that God punishes any one for turning into ridicule, falsehood, idolatry, heresy, superstition and the like ; on the contrary, God is pleased with those who confound heresy, idolatry, superstition and all kinds of error. But when the truths and the mysteries of our holy religion are denied, or turned into ridicule, God has, in many instances, shown his displeasure by inflicting terrible punishments on those who are guilty of such crimes. All truth is from God. Therefore, to contradict truth, to deny it, to turn it into ridicule, is to contradict God himself who uttered it—it is to mock the Lord of heaven and earth. No wonder, then, that we often hear of instances in which the wrath of God fell upon such enemies of the true religion. By these punishments God confirms those truths

and mysteries which are ridiculed and attacked. There are on record frightful chastisements with which God has visited those who denied or blasphemed his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament.

I will relate here some of these awful judgments of God. May they be a salutary warning to the wretched men who scoff and sneer at the holy mysteries.

In the village of Edinghausen, situated not far from the town of Bieldeld, in Rhenish Prussia, an impious blasphemer took it into his head one day to ridicule the Holy Eucharist. He sat down to table with some companions, not much better than himself. He took bread and wine and pronounced over them with mock solemnity, the sacred words of consecration. After this sacrilegious parody he distributed the bread and wine among his companions, saying to them with an ironical smile, "Take ye all of this." He had just distributed the bread and wine to the others and was about to take some himself, when suddenly he grew pale; his head fell on his chest, and in a few moments he was a corpse. This terrible judgment of God happened on the fifth of January, 1807. The wretch was buried outside the cemetery, on the feast of the Epiphany. (Schmid et Belet, Cat. II., 146.)

The Abbé Favre relates, that, some years ago, an impious barber of Turin had the impertinence to ridicule a person for wishing to assist at the procession of the Blessed Sacrament. He went into the street through which the procession was passing. There he placed himself with his hat on, in order thus to insult the Catholics and to ridicule the Blessed Sacrament. Behold! when the Blessed Sacrament passed by him he was struck by the hand of God and fell to the ground a corpse. This event made such

an impression on the whole city that the commissary caused the body of the impious man to be exposed before the court-house for thirty-six hours. A great many of the eye-witnesses of this fact are still living; among others, M. Raet, formerly rector of Plancherine, in the diocese of Chauberg, who was staying at Turin when this melancholy occurrence took place.

In the year 1563, a Lutheran nobleman in the city of Erfurt ridiculed the Blessed Sacrament as it was carried in procession by the Rev. Father Th. Baumeier. "Behold," said he, "what a ridiculous thing that old man is carrying!" No sooner had he uttered these words than he fell speechless to the ground. Dr. J. Hebenstreit was instantly called in, but pronounced the man beyond recovery. A few days after the nobleman was a corpse.

About thirty years ago, on the feast of Corpus Christi, several citizens of Duren, near Aix-la-Chapelle, were sitting together in an inn fronting on the market-place, when the solemn procession of the most holy sacrament was passing. Among those present was the son of the mayor. Now, as the priest gave the benediction, with the Blessed Sacrament, at the altar that had been erected in the square, this young man held up a silver dollar and mimicked the sacred ceremony. In a few days the very arm with which he had committed this sacrilege began to mortify; the mortification soon extended to the shoulder, and, not long after, the unhappy man died. Moreover, from this moment, the blessing of God forsook his house; several of his family died, and the rest sunk into poverty and disgrace.

In the summer of 18—a mission was given in the town of D., Mass. One of the missionary Fathers said Mass

and preached a few sermons, also, in the neighboring village of N. On the following Good Friday, Mrs. H., the parson's wife at N., took it into her head to mimic the missionaries and make a mockery of holy communion. She dressed herself somewhat like a missionary, collected a number of children, made them kneel down and hold a cloth, and then gave them something in mockery of holy communion. Next morning, holy Saturday, Mrs. H. was missed. Search was made, and she was found in the yard, her face buried in a pool of water—a ghastly corpse!

At the burning of the Ursuline Convent near Charlestown, Mass., when the nuns were driven from their cloister at the hour of midnight by a fanatical mob, one of the ruffians had the hardihood to open the tabernacle, and seizing the sacred vessels, he poured into the pocket of a companion the consecrated hosts which they contained. The latter, on his way back to Charlestown, treated the sacred particles with the most atrocious irreverence, and even jestingly offered them to a tavern-keeper in payment for the liquor he had drunk. He then returned home and gave to his wife an account of the night's proceedings. Shortly after he went into the yard, but as he did not return, the family became uneasy, and sought for him everywhere. After searching for some time, they found him—a ghastly corpse! He had died the death of Arius. This fact was related by the late Bishop Fenwick, of Boston.

Towards the close of the last century, there lived a very impious man in Rottweil, a little town of Swabia, Germany. One day, when the Blessed Sacrament in solemn procession passed the house of this wretch, he had the diabolical audacity to scoff at the holy sacrament in the most infamous



manner. He placed himself before the window, in his shirt-sleeves, wearing his butcher's apron and a white night-cap on his head. By appearing in this unbecoming dress, he wished to show his contempt and disrespect for the Holy Eucharist. What was still worse, as the Blessed Sacrament passed by him he spat at it. Only a few persons noticed his impiety, otherwise it would have been instantly avenged. But what men failed to do, God was not slow in accomplishing. This blasphemer soon after died the death of a reprobate. This, however, was not all. The dreadful scandal which he had given, and which had become generally known, and the insult which he had offered the divine Majesty, required a public act of reparation. God made use of the following means to effect this : Immediately after the death of this impious man, such horrible noises, such frightful groanings, lamentations and howlings were heard in his house that no one could live there. Everyone easily guessed the cause of this. The difficulty was, how to put a stop to these strange disturbances. At last, as if inspired by God, the people had recourse to the following expedient : It was resolved that this man's portrait should be painted, in the same dress and posture in which he had appeared when scoffing at the Blessed Sacrament, and that the painting should be placed in an opening made in the wall, that all might see how God punishes those who scoff at the Blessed Sacrament. Strange to say, no sooner was this painting placed in the wall, than the house became quiet. Some years after, the wife of a Protestant preacher, who lived opposite the house, could no longer bear the sight of this horrid portrait. Accordingly, her husband went to the civil magistrate, to obtain an ordinance for the removal of the picture. His petition was granted ; but no

sooner was the painting removed, than the former frightful disturbances returned, and continued until the people of the house obtained permission to restore the painting to its place. One of our fathers, an eye-witness of the fact, related this event to me.

About ten years ago, one of our priests received a letter from his father, in Treves, Germany. In this letter a terrible example was related that had occurred in that city, on the occasion of the solemn procession of Corpus Christi.

When the procession passed by the house of a certain Protestant gentleman, his servant-girl who was a Catholic, said to her master: "O come and see the splendid procession and the faith of the Catholics." In answer to this invitation, the gentleman uttered a horrible blasphemy against the Blessed Sacrament. No sooner had he done so than he fell to the ground a corpse! The whole city looked upon this sudden death as an evident chastisement of God for the horrid crime of blasphemy.

**TENTH MEANS.**—*Panic-stricken Soldiers proclaim the Real Presence.*

History informs us that the Emperor Frederic II. persecuted the holy Church of God. This wicked emperor accepted the services of the Saracens, the sworn enemies of the Christian religion. By fire and sword they laid waste the environs of Spoleto, in Italy. They showed their hatred against the Catholic religion, particularly by destroying churches and convents. Whilst they were besieging the city of Assisi, they tried to plunder and sack the convent of St. Damian, in which St. Clare lived, and of which she was abbess. The holy virgin was alone and unprotected. So full of confidence in God, she had

herself carried, sick as she was, to the gates of the convent. In her hands she held the Blessed Sacrament. As soon as the Saracens beheld in her hands the God of infinite majesty and holiness, they were seized with terror, they trembled in every limb, their weapons fell from their hands, they turned their backs and fled. Had an army in battle array stood before them, those fierce barbarians would have fought to the last; they would either have conquered or left their bleeding corpses on the plain. But when the holy virgin, St. Clare, stood before them bearing in her hands the God of armies,—that God, who rules the lightning and the thunder, they could not bear the sight of his awful majesty, they fled in terror from the face of their eternal Judge. St. Clare conquered, because Jesus, her divine Spouse, was with her; and as her enemies fled in terror, the heavens opened, and she heard the sweet voice of her heavenly Bridegroom, saying: Fear not; it is I: I will watch over thee." Now, would it not be ridiculous to say that a large army was panic-stricken and put to flight, by a piece of bread? It was not bread, but our Lord himself, who struck terror into the enemies of religion and made them raise the siege.

ELEVENTH MEANS.—*Rays of Light issuing from the Sacred Host proclaim the Real Presence.*

Assuredly, no one will maintain that rays of brilliant light could naturally come from a piece of bread, or that particles of bread could raise themselves into the air and shine like stars, in presence of a crowd of witnesses. Our Lord, however, has sometimes allowed some rays of his heavenly glory to shine through the outward appearance of bread under which he hides in the Blessed Sacrament.

In the monastery of Philoxenes, in the Island of Cyprus, there lived a poor man who wept day and night for several years. One day a celebrated religious, named John Moschus, having come with some others to visit this monastery, was greatly surprised at the sight of this singular monk. "Father," said one of the religious to him, "why do you weep thus? Do you not know that God alone is without sin?" "Ah! father, replied the penitent, "you have never yet found a sinner like me. I have committed a frightful crime, one for which I shall never cease asking pardon of God. Hear me, and judge for yourselves.

"While I was still in the world my wife and I had the misfortune to follow the heresy of the Severians. Returning home one day, I was surprised at my wife's absence; I inquired and sought for her for some time. At last I learned that she had gone to the house of a neighbor who was a Catholic, that she had been converted, and that they were to receive holy communion together that same morning. Full of rage at hearing this, I ran to the neighbor's house to prevent it; but I was too late: I arrived at the very moment when my wife was receiving communion. Blinded by my impious rage, I threw myself upon her, seized her by the throat, and never let go my hold till she had cast up the sacred host." Here the penitent monk stopped a moment overcome with grief. At length he resumed, "The holy host fell upon the ground, but to the great surprise of all who witnessed this sacrilege, the host appeared *all luminous, sending forth rays of brilliant light*. We prostrated to adore it. Two days after, a devil as black as an Ethiop appeared to me, and said: 'We are both condemned to the same torment.' I was terrified at my crime,



renounced heresy, became a Catholic and shut myself up in this monastery, where, as you see, I can do nothing but weep over my crime. God grant, that I may obtain pardon for it." (John Moschus, *Spiritual Meadow*, Chap. 30.)

The Abbé Favre relates a miracle which took place at Turin in the year 1453, during the pontificate of Nicholas V. One night, a thief entered one of the churches of the city and stole the sacred vessels. He then loaded his horse with the sacred burden, and attempted to leave the city at daybreak; but his horse fell on its knees, and with all his efforts the thief could not make it rise. The people at length began to suspect something, so they took off the burden from the horse and found, to their horror, the sacred vessels. A consecrated host which had remained in the ciborium rose into the air to the height of about sixty feet. The bishop, hearing of this fact, went in procession to the place accompanied by a great multitude. As soon as he arrived at the place the holy host descended into the chalice which he held in his hand, and was carried to St. John's Cathedral. A splendid church was erected on the spot on which this great miracle happened, and on the balustrade the following inscription is still to be seen: "*Hic stetit equus.*" This miracle is still annually commemorated by a festival kept throughout the whole diocese, and by a solemn procession in the city of Turin. God was pleased to work this miracle to confirm the faith of the people against the errors of the Hussites and Albigenses, who were then ravaging that part of Italy.

The following miracle is related by St. Francis de Sales. In a certain church in the town of Favernay, in France, the Blessed Sacrament was once exposed on a side altar. During the exposition, a spark happening to fall from one

of the tapers, set the altar on fire. In a short time everything was destroyed; even the repository, in which the Blessed Sacrament was kept, was consumed. The Blessed Sacrament itself, however, remained in its place, and when the priest endeavored to carry it to the high altar, he found that he could not move it. He then began to celebrate Mass, and when he came to the consecration, the host came, of its own accord, to the high altar, and remained there till after the communion, when it returned to its former place and remained suspended in the air as before. This miracle was repeated for several years in succession. St. Francis de Sales says that he himself made a pilgrimage to the place in order to witness this miracle.

“Having received information from many persons of the wonderful occurrence which I am now going briefly to relate,” says St. Alphonsus in his book, “Visits to the Blessed Sacrament,” “I endeavored to collect evidence sufficient to enable me to publish an account of it; and I first obtained a full relation of the fact, written by a priest of the same town, who was one of the eye-witnesses of the miracle. But, not satisfied with this, I read, myself, the authentic process which was drawn up by the archiepiscopal court of Naples, by order of his Eminence Cardinal Sersale, the present archbishop. The process is very long, consisting of 364 pages,—a most careful investigation into the facts having been made by the officers of the court from the evidence of many priests and lay persons, all of whom, in perfect agreement, made their depositions on oath.

“It happened, on the morning of the 28th of January in the year 1772, at a place called S. Pietro à Paterno, in the diocese of Naples, that the tabernacle of the parish church, in which the Blessed Sacrament was preserved,

was found open, and that the two ciboriums, a large and a small one, containing many particles, had been taken away.

“For several days the whole neighborhood was in the greatest distress; and, though the most diligent search was made, no tidings could be obtained either of the ciboriums or of the sacred particles. At length, on Thursday, the 18th of February, a certain youth, Giuseppe Orefice, about eighteen years of age, was passing in the evening near the property of the Duke of Grottolelle, and saw a number of lights, which had the appearance of bright stars. The following evening he saw the same thing; and, on coming home, he told his father what he had seen; his father, however, would not believe him.

“On the following day, about an hour before sunrise, the father was passing by the same spot, with Giuseppe and his brother Giovanni, (a child of eleven years,) who, turning to his father, said: ‘See, father, the lights of which Giuseppe spoke to you yesterday evening, and you would not believe him.’

“On the evening of the same day the same boys, on coming home, again saw the lights in the same place. D. Girolamo Guarino, the confessor of Giuseppe Orefice, was then informed of it, and he, in company with his brother, D. Diego, also a priest, went to the spot where the lights had been seen, and meanwhile sent for Orefice, who, on coming there with his brother and a person called Tomaso Piccino, again saw the lights; but at that time the priests saw nothing.

“On the evening of Monday, the 23d of February, Orefice returned to the spot with Piccino and a man named Carlo Marotta, and met on the road two strangers, who stopped and asked them what those many lights were which

they had just seen distinctly and which twinkled like stars? They answered that they did not know; and taking leave of the strangers, they ran in haste to mark the spot where they had seen the lights. As soon as they had marked the spot, which was distant a few steps from the hedge, and in which was a poplar tree higher than the rest of the trees, they went to find the two priests already mentioned, told them what had occurred, and all returned together to the spot.

“When they were all there, with a child of five years old, nephew to the two priests, the child cried out, ‘See, there are the lights, which look like two candles.’ (Here we must observe, that the lights did not always appear in the same manner.) At the same moment Orefice saw these two lights, and said that they shone like two stars; Carlo and Tomaso also saw them, and three other children of Signor Guarino, close to the poplar already mentioned.

“After this they heard the shouting of many people, who, from a stack of straw which was on the property, were begging the priest to come and see in the stack a great light in the shape of a flame. In the meantime, a woman, named Lucia Marotta, threw herself with her face to the ground on the spot where the light was seen.

“The priests and many other persons ran up, and having lifted up the woman, commenced to dig the ground; but they found nothing. The two brothers, Giuseppe Orefice, with Tomaso Piccino and Carlo Marotta, then returned to the town, and going along the Strada Regia, they heard the cries of those who had remained on the spot. Going back there, Piccino fell suddenly upon his face; and after a few steps, Giuseppe felt himself pushed forward on the shoulders, and he also at once fell to the ground. In the



same way, and at the same moment, the other two, Carlo Marotta and Giovanni, Giuseppe's brother, also fell; and all four felt their heads wounded, as if they had received a severe blow with a stick.

“Having got up, they went forward a few steps; and both Giuseppe and Carlo, as also Tomaso and Giovanni, saw a light, brilliant as the light of the sun, coming forth from beneath the poplar tree; and they all four saw rising out of this light, to about four or five feet in height, a dove, which was almost as brilliant as the light itself: the dove, however, gliding down into the earth at the foot of the poplar, from which it came out, disappeared, as did also the light. What the dove signified is not known; but it appears certain that it was something supernatural; and all the persons already mentioned gave evidence of the fact, upon oath, before the vicar-general of Naples.

“After this, remaining in the same place, they all cried out: ‘See, there are the lights!’ And, going on their knees, they began to seek for the sacred particles. While Piccino was scooping out the earth with his hands, they saw one particle come out white as paper. They then sent to call the priests. D. Diego Guarino came, and, kneeling down, he took the sacred particle and put it in a white linen handkerchief, amid the tears and devotion of all the people.

“He then began to search more carefully; and having removed some more earth, he saw a group of about forty particles appear, which had not lost their whiteness, although they had been buried for nearly a month. They were placed in the same handkerchief, and the earth in which they were found was also removed.

“It being now rumored about, other priests of the place came to the spot, bringing with them a ciborium, cotta, stole, canopy, and torches. In the meantime, a priest and a gentleman went to the vicar-general, to know what was to be done. An order came, that the particles should be carried in procession to the church. They did so, and arrived at the church about half-past eleven at night, when the particles were placed in the tabernacle.

“This took place on the night of the 24th of February. The people were much consoled, but not fully so, because the greater part of the particles, as was supposed, were still wanting.

“On the evening of the following Tuesday, the 25th, a small light, but very brilliant, was seen in the same place as at first, by many persons, country-people, gentlemen, as also by the priests D. Diego Guarino and D. Giuseppe Lindtner, who wrote for me an account of the whole affair, as I mentioned at the beginning. This priest being much terrified, pointed to a mustard-plant which was growing there, and cried out: ‘O Jesus, O Jesus! look at the light there,—look at it!’ Upon which the others also saw a most dazzling light, which rose about a foot and a half from the ground, and formed itself on the top into the figure of a rose. Giuseppe Orefice, who was there, affirmed that the light was so brilliant that his eyes remained for some time dazzled and dimmed.

“They began, therefore, to seek the remainder of the particles in that place, but found none; but on the evening of the following day, the 26th of February, a number of lights were seen around the stack of straw by three cavalry soldiers of the regiment called Borbone,—Pasquale de S. Angelo of the diocese of Atri and Penne, Giuseppe

Lanzano, and Angelo Di Costanzo of Acerra,—who were all examined before the archiepiscopal court. These deposed before the vicar-general, that as they were riding round the royal villa of Caserta, where his majesty the king then resided, they saw on the property above mentioned ‘several lights shining like stars.’ These are the very words of the soldiers, as taken down in the process.

“Moreover, on the same evening of the 26th, Signor D. Ferdinando Haam, a gentleman of Prague in Bohemia, chancellor and secretary to the embassy of his imperial and royal apostolic majesty, was returning from the city of Caserta at about nine at night, along the Strada Regia, near to the above-mentioned property, he got down from his carriage to go and see the place where the stolen particles had been found two days before. On arriving there he found many persons, and among them the priest D. Giuseppe Lindtner, with whom he was acquainted, who told him the whole history,—both of the sacrilege and of the miraculous discovery of the particles. Signor Haam, after having heard the priest, related that he also, eight or nine days before, on the 17th or 18th of the month, not having then heard either of the particles that had been stolen or of the lights that had been seen, was passing by this place about nine at night, and that he saw ‘a great number of lights amounting to about a thousand ;’ and at the same time, a number of persons who were standing in silence and with devotion round the lights. Being much frightened at what he saw, he asked the driver what those lights were. He answered, ‘that perhaps they were accompanying the most holy viaticum to some sick person.’ ‘No,’ said Signor Haam, ‘that cannot be,

otherwise we should at least hear the bells.' Hence, he suspected that these lights were the effect of some diabolical sorcery, especially as the horse had stopped and would not go a step; he, therefore, made the driver get down, but it was impossible to make the horse go on, as it trembled all over and foamed at the mouth. At last, after many attempts, the horse, drawn away by force out of the road which led to the ground, set off with such speed that the driver cried out: 'O Jesus! what will come of this?' And so Signor D. Ferdinando returned to Naples seized with great fear. He himself deposed the whole of this in the archiepiscopal court, as may be read in the process, page 60, etc.

"On the evening of Thursday, the 27th, at about seven o'clock Giuseppe Orefice and Carlo Marotta went to the place where the stack of straw was, which they found had been burned by the priests D. Girolamo Guarino and Giuseppe Lindtner, in order that they might more easily search for the missing particles: they found, also, Giuseppe Piscopo, Carmine Esposito, and Palmiero Novello, prostrate on the ground and weeping, because they had seen a little light appearing and disappearing before them several times. When Orefice heard this, he knelt down, and began to recite the acts of faith, hope, and charity: when he had finished he returned with the others to see what the light was, which, according to the deposition of Orefice, rose up about four fingers from the earth, and then disappeared as it were in the ground. After this, having put a mark over the place where the light had appeared, so as not to be mistaken, Orefice and Marotta went to inform the priest, D. Girolamo Guarino, who came immediately to the place and found many persons kneeling there:



he began to search with care about the ground on which the mark had been placed.

“At this moment many persons again saw the light; and Guarino, who did not see it, made the sign of the cross upon the ground, and ordered his brother Giuseppe to scoop out the earth on which the stack of straw had stood, on the left of the cross, with a pick-axe which he had in his hand; but he found nothing. However, just as they were thinking of digging in another place, Giuseppe Orefice, who was on his knees all this time, put his hand on the ground, and finding that it was soft and yielding, mentioned it to the Rev. Guarino, who, taking a knife from his brother, stuck it into the ground, on the spot which had been marked with the cross; and when it was at its depth, he heard a noise as if several hosts united together were broken. He drew the knife out of the ground, and with it a little clod of earth, to which he saw many particles attached. Struck with fear at what he saw, he cried out in astonishment: “Oh, oh, oh!” and then fainted away; so that, as he himself deposed, his sight failed him, and, losing all power over himself, the knife, with the clod of earth and the particles, fell from his hand.

“As soon as Guarino recovered his senses, he put the particles in a white linen handkerchief, covered them up, and laid them in the hole in which they had been found; for, on account of the trembling which had come over him, he was not able to stand upright. The parish priest, being informed of what had happened, came quickly to the spot, where he found all kneeling before this hidden treasure. As soon as he learned the particulars, he went back to the church, and sent a canopy, veil, a number of wax-tapers, and a chalice, in which the sacred particles were put.

The assistants spread the veil over a little table covered with silk, on which the Blessed Sacrament reposed; round this a number of persons knelt with lighted torches, and many people arrived, not only from the town, but also from the surrounding villages, with their priests; all of whom shed tears of tender devotion. In the meantime the priest Lindtner and Signor Giuseppe Guarino went off to find the vicar-general, and returned about ten o'clock, with orders to carry in procession the particles that had been found, to the parish church of S. Pietro à Paterno. They did so, and along the way they all sang, praising and thanking Almighty God. As soon as they arrived at the church, benediction was given with the chalice, in the midst of the tears and cries of devotion of the whole people, who could not leave off weeping and thanking the Lord for the great consolation they had received.

“We read in the history of olden times of many such prodigies in confirmation of the real presence of our Lord in the most holy sacrament. I myself, in my *History of Heresies*, have related many examples of this kind that happened in the time of the impious Wickliffe, who was the first of modern heretics to deny the truth of this venerable sacrament. At that time Almighty God was pleased to work many miracles to confound the incredulity of heretics, which I have inserted in the book just mentioned. (Chap. n. 36, 37.) Nevertheless, there are not wanting certain critical spirits who altogether refuse to believe these ancient accounts, and say, ‘But who saw them?’ Now, if such a one should doubt the fact which I have just related, and which was proved with such exactness in the archiepiscopal court of Naples, he can easily ascertain the truth of it by going to the town of S. Pietro à Paterno,

which is not far from the city, where he will find many lay persons and ecclesiastics who will assure him that they beheld, with their own eyes, the prodigies here related.

“For the rest, let them say what they please; for my own part I hold the fact to be more than certain, and therefore I wished to make it known by publishing an account of it. It is true that the miracle here described does not call for any other than mere human faith; nevertheless, of all such facts grounded on human testimony, I do not know if there be one that is more deserving of belief than this that I have related, considering the extreme care with which inquiry was made by the Neapolitan court, and the evidence, not of credulous women, but of seventeen men, lay and ecclesiastics, who judicially deposed on oath all that they had seen with their own eyes. All these circumstances, which are so many marks of truth, make the fact more than morally certain. Hence, I hope that all those who read this account will not be disinclined to believe it, but will do what they can to make it known for the glory of the most holy sacrament of the altar!”

TWELFTH MEANS.—*Miraculous Communion proclaim the Real Presence.*

No one is silly enough to believe that our Lord would employ an angel to bear a small particle of bread to one of his servants. It was not bread, therefore, but the body of Jesus Christ that was carried to St. Stanislaus by St. Barbara, to Blessed Gerard Majella by the Archangel St. Michael, and so on, as we read in the lives of the saints.

A visitor to Bologna may see the tombstone of a child called Imelda. The history of the child is written on the tombstone. She died at the age of seven, in the year 1393.

On Easter Sunday morning there were many children in the church, assembled to make their first communion. Little Imelda had begged hard to make her first communion, but the sisters thought that she was too young and too childish in her ways. They told her she must wait until she was older. So the child was obliged to stay far away from the altar, near the door of the church. She was alone in sadness and tears, because she could not receive Jesus whom she loved. But there was One watching her who measures not the years, but the love of souls. Jesus could not bear to see the child lonesome and sorrowful, because she was not permitted to receive him. The bell sounded for the communicants to approach the altar. The altar-rails were filled with a long line of happy children. The priest was standing on the highest step, holding the Blessed Sacrament in his hand, saying—"Behold the Lamb of God." At that moment a ray of dazzling light went forth from the Blessed Sacrament to the little Imelda, at the door of the church. Then the priest saw, with astonishment, that the Blessed Sacrament which he held in his hand the moment before, was no longer there! He had seen the ray of light, reaching to Imelda, and now above her he beheld what seemed a star of light. Imelda's eyes were also lifted up, looking at the bright star that glittered in her beautiful eyes. She knew it was the light of Jesus himself who had come to his dear child. The priest left the altar, following the bright path. The people made way for him, hushed in deep and solemn silence. He reached Imelda, and to his wonder saw the sacred host, suspended in the air over the head of the child. With trembling hand he took the Blessed Sacrament and gave it to Imelda, who thus received her Jesus. A short time



after, the little girl was seen to lean on one side, with pale face, as though she were ill. The sisters gathered around her and took her in their arms, thinking she had fainted. On her face there was an angelic smile, the arms were crossed over the breast, as though holding fast to the treasure she had received. The joy of the little child at receiving Jesus had been too great to be able to part with him again. The frail life went back to him who sent it forth. The Master had need of her, and she went home.

The saintly curé of Ars related the following fact: "Whilst catechising the people," said this holy priest, "there came to me two Protestant ministers who did not believe in the real presence of our Lord in the Blessed Eucharist. I said to them: 'Do you think a piece of bread could detach itself, and, of its own accord, place itself on the tongue of a person who came near to receive it?' They replied, 'No.' 'Well, then,' said I, 'it is not bread.'" The holy priest then said: "There was a man who had doubts about the real presence. He said to himself, What do we know about it? It is not certain what consecration is, and what takes place at that time on the altar. But this man wished to believe and prayed to the Blessed Virgin to obtain faith for him. Listen attentively to this. I do not say this happened elsewhere, but that it happened to myself. When this man came up to receive holy communion, the sacred host detached itself from my fingers whilst I was yet some distance from the communion rail, and placed itself on this man's tongue."—(Spirit of the Curé of Ars.) St. Bonaventure and others received holy communion in the same miraculous manner.

THIRTEENTH MEANS.—*Blood issuing from the Sacred Host proclaims the Real Presence.*

Do you believe that real blood can issue from a piece of bread as thin and small as a little host? You answer, no. But blood has issued more than once from the sacred host. The sacred host, therefore, is something more than mere bread. Whilst the French were preparing for war with Austria, there were seen during Mass several large drops of blood issuing from the consecrated host in the parish church at Vrigne-aux-Bois, near Sedan. This miracle was witnessed by many persons on the 7th of February, the 29th of April, the 8th and 15th of May, 1859. The last of these miraculous hosts is still preserved in the new church of Vrigne-aux-Bois.—(Les Hosties sanglantes de Vrigne-aux-Bois.—Trois lettres de M. l'Abbé Jules Morel.)

The following instance is related by St. Alphonsus, in his *History of Heresies*. It occurred about the time in which Wickliffe began to deny the doctrine of the real presence. Some Jews procured a sacred host, through a servant-girl whom they had bribed to receive it unworthily. They then carried the Blessed Sacrament to an inn, where they cut it into several pieces. Immediately a great quantity of blood issued from each of the particles; but this miracle did not convert those unhappy wretches. They now concealed the particles in a meadow near the city of Posen. Some time after, a cowherd, on crossing this meadow, saw the small particles of the host rising into the air and shining like fiery flames; he saw, moreover, that the oxen fell on their knees as if in adoration. The cowherd, who was a Catholic, told his father what he had seen, and the father, having also witnessed the miracle, acquainted the magistrate of the fact. Thereupon a

great concourse of people flocked to the place to witness the miracle. In fine, the bishop, with the clergy of the city, went in procession to the place, and having deposited the holy particles in a ciborium, they carried them to the church. A small chapel was built on the spot where this miracle occurred. This chapel was afterwards enlarged and converted into a magnificent church by Wenceslaus, king of Bohemia; and Stephen, the archbishop, testifies to his having seen in this church these bloody particles.

It is related in the chronicles of the Hieronimites, that a religious of that order, named Peter of Cavanelas, was much tempted by doubts about the presence of blood in the sacred host. It pleased God to deliver him from the temptation in the following manner: One Saturday, as he was saying Mass in honor of our Blessed Lady, a thick cloud descended upon the altar and enveloped it completely. When the cloud had disappeared, he looked for the host he had consecrated, but could not find it. The chalice, too, was empty. Full of fear, he prayed to God to assist him in this perplexity; whereupon he beheld the host, upon a paten, in the air. He noticed that blood was flowing from it into the chalice. The blood continued to flow until the chalice was as full as it had been before. After his death, this miracle was found recorded in his own handwriting. At the time it happened, nothing was known about it, as our Lord enjoined secrecy upon him. Even the person who served his Mass knew nothing about it; he only noticed that the priest shed many tears, and that the Mass lasted longer than usual.

In 1369, the following incident occurred in the Netherlands. A Jew of Enguien, named Jonathas, prefect of the synagogue, persuaded another Jew of Brussels, named

John de Louvain, who had been apparently converted to Christianity, to bring him some consecrated hosts. The latter, urged by the promise of a large sum of money, entered one night the church of St. John the Baptist at Malembeck, which was situated without the city, took the ciborium, containing fifteen hosts, and gave it to Jonathas. This wicked Jew now began to offer every imaginable indignity and outrage to our Blessed Lord in the mystery of his love. A few days after this occurrence, Jonathas was murdered. His wife, considering his death to be a just chastisement of God, and fearing that she might be punished in a similar manner, went to Brussels and gave the ciborium, with the hosts, to some Jews who preserved them till Good Friday of the year 1370. On this day they treated the sacred hosts with every kind of indignity. At last they pierced them, and immediately miraculous blood began to flow from them. These impious wretches were so terrified at this sight that they fell to the ground. On recovering from their terror, they resolved to send the hosts to the Jews of Cologne. A woman named Catherine was charged with this commission. She, however, full of fear and remorse of conscience, carried the hosts to her parish priest at Aix-la-Chapelle, and gave him an account of all that had happened. The priest then informed the duke and duchess of the whole affair. The impious Jews were arrested and tried, and having been fully convicted of the crime, they suffered the punishment they so justly deserved. This happened on the eve of Ascension day, 1370. This history is recorded in the archives of the city of Brussels. The sacred hosts are still preserved in the Church of St. Gudule in the same city. There are also several pictures in this church representing this event.



FOURTEENTH MEANS.—*The extraordinary gift of certain saints by which they could detect the Blessed Sacrament even when hidden, and at a distance, proclaims the Real Presence.*

There have been many holy persons who had a supernatural instinct by which they were sensible of the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, even when it was hidden and at a distance from them. They could distinguish a consecrated host from one that was not consecrated.

In reference to the holiest of all things—the sacrament of the Eucharist, we find that those saints who have succeeded in raising themselves to the higher regions of spiritual life, were all endowed with the faculty of discovering the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, even when it was hidden and at a considerable distance.

Blessed Margaret of the Blessed Sacrament, a Carmelite nun in France, had an extraordinary devotion to Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist even from her earliest childhood. Her sisters in religion had reason to believe that she could distinguish a consecrated host from an unconsecrated one. To find out for certain whether she enjoyed this extraordinary gift they made use of the following expedient. Having locked the doors of the church, they lighted the candles on the altar, placed the remonstrance with an unconsecrated host in it, and then all passed and knelt in adoration to Jesus Christ in heaven. But Margaret, although she knew nothing of the intention of the sisters, could not be deceived. She passed by the altar with the sisters, but did not kneel down,—nay, she passed by hastily, without making even the least sign of reverence, although she had always been in the habit of kneeling down and kissing the floor out of love and rever-

ence for Jesus Christ in the tabernacle. On being asked by some of the sisters why she did not prostrate herself there, to pray to our Lord, she said: "Because our Lord Jesus Christ is not there," and she hastened to the oratory where the Blessed Sacrament was kept.

The sisters then gave her another trial. They knew that Margaret found great relief from her sufferings whilst she was in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, but they knew also that she could not tell whether she was in the church or not, because she was blind; so they often took her before the Blessed Sacrament to procure her relief. Once, however, before taking her thither they carried her to various places, where the blessed Eucharist was not kept, and then exhorted her to pray to Jesus Christ. But she answered in a plaintive voice: "I do not find my Saviour here," and, addressing herself to our Lord, she said: "My Lord, I do not find here *thy divine truth*," after which she besought the sisters to carry her into the presence of the Blessed Sacrament. (Her life, by P. Poesl, C. S. S. R.)

Blessed Ida of Louvain was always sensible of the presence of our Lord at the precise moment of consecration. Once when the server at Mass had, by mistake, given the priest water instead of wine, so that there was no consecration, St. Coleta, though kneeling at a distance, perceived it by a supernatural instinct.

The Cistercian nun, Juliana, always knew when the Blessed Sacrament was moved from St. Martin's Church at the close of the service, and each time she used to be overwhelmed with sadness. This was frequently witnessed by her friend Eva. One day, the Franciscans of Villonda invited the holy Carmelite Cassetus to visit them. To

try him they took the Blessed Sacrament out of the tabernacle, in which it was usually kept, and placed it elsewhere. They put no light before it, but left the lamp burning as usual before the customary altar. On entering the church, the companion of Cassetus turned toward the high altar; but Cassetus immediately pointed out the spot where the Blessed Sacrament had been placed, saying: "The body of our Lord is there, and not where the lamp is burning; the brothers whom you see behind the grating have placed it there in order to try us."

St. Francis Borgia had the same gift, and on entering a church, he always walked straight to the spot where the Blessed Sacrament was kept, even when no external sign indicated its presence. In 1839, Prince Licknowsky visited Mary Moerl, the celebrated Tyrolese virgin, upon whom God bestowed so many miraculous gifts. While she was kneeling in ecstasy on her bed, he observed that she moved round toward the window. Neither he nor any of those present could tell the cause of this. At last, on looking out, they saw a priest passing by, carrying the viaticum to the sick, without bell or chant, or any sound that could give notice of its approach.

In the life of St. Lidwina of Holland, it is recorded that the priest, in order to try her, gave her an unconsecrated host, but the saint perceived that it was only bread, and said: "Your reverence will please give me another host, for that which you hold in your hand is not Jesus Christ."

FIFTEENTH MEANS.—*Irrational Animals proclaim the Real Presence.*

It may excite surprise to learn that even irrational animals can teach us lessons of faith in the real presence

of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament. But such is really the case. There are several instances on record which prove that the divine Author of nature has been pleased sometimes so to direct the instinct of brutes that, by their behavior, they might confound the pride and unbelief of heretics and infidels, or awaken the faith and devotion of lukewarm and indifferent Catholics. Holy Scripture tells us that one day God spoke to Balaam by means of an ass. "And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said: 'What have I done to thee?'"—(Numbers xxii., 123.)

A similar, but more wonderful instance, is found in the life of St. Anthony of Padua. As Almighty God by the Prophet Isaias, proposed the docility of the ox and the ass in order to rebuke the stubbornness of the children of Israel, so, in this instance, he made use of a brute beast to reprove the folly, rashness and impiety of those who reject the mystery of the real presence.

During the lifetime of St. Anthony of Padua there lived at Tolosa, in Spain, a very obstinate heretic named Bovillus, who denied the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Although compelled by St. Anthony to acknowledge in his heart the truth of the doctrine, Bovillus still persisted obstinately in his heresy. At last he professed his willingness to believe provided he should see a miracle wrought in proof of this doctrine. "What, then, do you desire?" asked St. Anthony. "I will keep an ass three days without food," said Bovillus; "afterwards I will bring him to you. On one side I will place food before the hungry animal, and on the other side you shall stand with the Blessed Sacrament. In case the ass leaves the food and goes to you, I will believe that Jesus Christ is truly and really present in the Blessed Sacrament." St. Anthony



agreed to the proposal. On the day appointed, a great concourse of people were assembled in the public square to see the issue of this extraordinary trial. The saint, after having said Mass, took the Blessed Sacrament with him to the square. Now when the hungry animal had been brought near and food put before him, St. Anthony, holding in his hand the Blessed Sacrament, addressed the dumb brute thus: "In the name of my Creator, whom I, though unworthy, now hold in my hands, I command thee to draw near and prostrate thyself before thy God, and give due honor to him, that the heretics may learn from thee how they ought to worship their God in the Blessed Sacrament." And, behold! no sooner had St. Anthony uttered these words, than the ass left his food, went to the Blessed Sacrament, and bowed his head to the ground, as if in adoration. At this sight Bovillus and his whole family, together with many other heretics, were converted and professed their faith in the real presence. Some time after he built a church in honor of St. Peter, and his grandchildren, inheritors of his zeal for God's glory, also built a church in which they caused this miracle to be sculptured upon the wall of the archway, in order thus to show their gratitude to God for the gift of faith, and to perpetuate the memory of his goodness and power.

St. Francis of Assisi, whose power over irrational creatures almost carries us back to the days of man's original innocence, was followed by a sheep wherever he went. This sheep went even into the church, and, during the time of Mass, would keep quiet until the consecration, when it would kneel down as if to adore its Creator.

The most striking fact of this reverence shown by animals, and one which would seem almost incredible if its

truth were not vouched for by such authors as John Eusebius and Stephen Menochius, is related of a baker's dog at Lisbon. This dog, without ever having been taught to do so, seemed to exhibit toward the most Blessed Sacrament that devoted fidelity which so often distinguishes the attachment of these animals to their masters. As soon as the bell rang to announce that the Blessed Sacrament was to be carried to the sick, he would run to the church, and, lying down at the door, he would wait till the priest came out with the Blessed Sacrament, when he would join the procession, running from one side to the other as if he was deputed to keep order. Once, the bell was rung about midnight. The dog instantly jumped up to go in all haste to the church, but all the doors of the house being locked, so that he could not get out, he went to his master's room, whining and barking, in order to awaken him; but not succeeding, he went to another person, whom he pulled by his clothes to the door of the house, and held on to him till he opened it. Once, in Holy Week, he watched for twenty-four hours consecutively when the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the repository. He would not suffer the slightest irreverence in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and as long as he was in the church, no one dared to sit or stand. On one occasion, as the viaticum was being carried to a sick person, he found a pedlar asleep on the roadside; he barked until the man awoke, uncovered his head, and knelt whilst the viaticum was passing. On another occasion, he compelled a countrywoman, who was riding on an ass, to dismount and adore the Blessed Sacrament. Sometimes he was mistaken in the signal, and would go to the church when the bell had rung for a funeral; in such cases he would return home imme-

diately. No one, not even his master, was able to break him of this habit; and whether they tried to entice him with food, or tied him, all was in vain. When food was given to him on such occasions, he would snap at the meat once or twice, then, as if fearing to be late, he would run off to the church. When he was tied, to keep him from running to church, he would howl so dreadfully that the people were glad to release him. Thus God was pleased to give us, through a creature devoid of understanding, a lesson in our duty.

A few years ago, in a town of Germany, some sacrilegious thieves broke into a Catholic Church, and among other sacred vessels stole also the remonstrance. They took the Blessed Sacrament out of the remonstrance and threw it into a field hard by. On the following morning, the farmers, on their way to work, beheld a brilliant light issuing from the field. They went thither, and, to their amazement, they saw a vast swarm of bees flying to and fro and working with unwearied diligence. The people drew nearer, and beheld a beautiful remonstrance of pure wax which the bees were building around the Blessed Sacrament. The good people fell on their knees and adored our Lord with all the fervor of their hearts. They then went in haste to the priest, and told him what they had seen.

The priest wept tears of joy at finding the Blessed Sacrament again, went forth in solemn procession, and brought the Blessed Sacrament in its beautiful waxen remonstrance back to the church.

SIXTEENTH MEANS.—*Jesus visible in the Sacred Host.*

Do you think that a piece of bread could change itself into a beautiful living infant, or into the form of a grown

person? Certainly not. But our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament has frequently appeared as a child and as a full-grown man, in order to prove to us his real presence.

Tillemond of Breidenbach (Lib. I. collat. c. 1 ex Hist. Eccl. Alb. Cranzii, L. 2, c. 9.) relates the following wonderful fact of the famous Wittikind, duke of the Saxons, in the eighth century; "Wittikind, while still a pagan, and waging an obstinate war against Charlemagne, emperor of the Franks, was curious to know what was passing in the camp of the Christians. For this purpose he disguised himself as a pilgrim. It was at the time of the Easter festival, when the whole Frankish army were receiving the paschal communion. Wittikind entered the camp without being recognized, admired the ceremonies of the holy Mass and was present thereat with an attention and a pious curiosity one could hardly expect from a barbarian and a pagan. What surprised him most was to see in the host at consecration, and also in each host with which the priest communicated the soldiers, a child of wondrous beauty, all radiant with light. This child seemed to enter with extreme joy the mouths of some, while he entered the mouths of others only with the greatest reluctance. At the same time Wittikind experienced a great interior joy which he never felt before. He knew not what all this meant. After the divine service, he placed himself among the beggars and asked an alms of the emperor as he passed. At the same moment an officer recognizing the duke, whispered to the emperor: 'Your majesty, this pilgrim is the duke of the Saxons.' Whereupon the emperor, ordering the duke to go with him, said: 'Why do you come among us in the disguise of a pilgrim? Wittikind humbly asked pardon and excused himself, saying,



that he did not come as a spy, but from a desire to know something of the divine service of the Christians. 'What, then, did you see?' asked the emperor. 'Your majesty,' replied the duke, 'I saw such wonderful things as I never heard of, or witnessed before.' Then he related all he had seen, and asked an explanation from the emperor. Charlemagne was greatly astonished at the goodness of our Lord who had appeared in the host to this pagan, and said to him: 'You have received from God a favor which he did not grant even to many of the saints.' He then instructed Wittikind in our holy religion and induced him to embrace it. The subjects of Wittikind soon followed his example. This happened in the year 804."

A certain priest, after having distributed holy communion to the faithful, found one of the sacred hosts lying on the floor. Full of consternation, he knelt down to take it up, when the host arose, of its own accord, and placed itself on the purifier. The priest immediately called those who were present, and when they came near the altar, they all saw in the sacred host Jesus Christ, under the form of a child of exquisite beauty. "On hearing the news," says our author, Thomas Catimpré, "I, too, went to Douay. After I had declared to the dean the object of my visit, we went together to the church, and no sooner had he opened the ciborium wherein the miraculous host was preserved, than we both beheld our divine Saviour." "I saw," continues the writer, "the head of Jesus Christ, like that of a full-grown man. It was crowned with thorns. Two drops of blood trickled down his forehead and fell on his cheek. With tearful eyes I fell prostrate before him. When I arose again, I no longer saw either the crown of thorns or the drops of blood, but only the face of a man

whose aspect inspired great veneration." This miracle gave rise to a confraternity in honor of the most Holy Eucharist, to which several popes, especially Paul III. and Innocent XI., granted numerous indulgences. (P. Favre *Le Ciel ouvert*.)

In the village of *Les Ulmes de St. Florent*, in the diocese of Angers, the following miracle occurred on the second of June, 1666, the Saturday within the octave of the feast of Corpus Christi. The people were assembled in the church for benediction, and when the priest had intoned the hymn *Verbum Caro, panem verum*, there appeared in place of the host the figure of a man. He was clothed in white, and his hands were crossed on his breast; his hair fell upon his shoulders, and his countenance was resplendent with majesty. The curate then invited all his parishioners to come and witness the miracle: "If there be any infidel here," said he, "let him now draw near." Every one approached and gazed upon this beautiful vision for about a quarter of an hour, after which the host resumed its former shape. The bishop of Angers, Mgr. Henry Arnaud, after having examined the testimony in favor of this miracle, caused it to be proclaimed throughout the whole of France.

Padbert relates, that a certain priest named Plegile asked of our Saviour the favor to be permitted to see him with his corporal eyes in the Holy Eucharist. As this request did not proceed from unbelief, but rather from an ardent love, it was granted. One day, during Mass, this pious priest knelt down after the consecration and besought our Lord anew to grant his request. An angel then appeared to him and bade him arise. He raised his head and saw our divine Saviour in the form of an infant. Full

of joy and reverence, he begged our Lord to conceal himself again under the sacramental species, and immediately the Holy Eucharist assumed its usual appearance. This miracle was also witnessed by many other persons. (P. Favre.)

Our Lord, in his great mercy, has even gone so far as to manifest himself to his enemies—to unbelievers.

In the life of St. Gregory the Great, written by Paul the deacon, it is related that a noble matron of Rome who was accustomed to prepare the hosts for the holy sacrifice of Mass, went one Sunday to receive holy communion from the holy pontiff. When he gave her the Blessed Eucharist, saying: "May the body of our Lord Jesus Christ preserve thy soul unto life everlasting," she laughed outright. Seeing this, the sovereign pontiff did not give her the Blessed Sacrament, but replaced it on the altar; and when the holy mysteries were ended, he asked the lady why she laughed when about to receive the body of the Lord. "Why," said she, "I laughed because I saw that, which you said was the body of the Lord, was one of those very wafers which I had made with my own hands." Upon this the Pope ordered all present to pray that God, in confirmation of the truth, would cause all to see with the eyes of the body what the unbelief of this woman had prevented her from seeing with the eyes of the soul. Accordingly, when the holy pontiff and all present had prayed for a while, the corporal was removed, and in sight of the multitude who pressed round to witness the miracle, the holy host was visibly changed into flesh. Then, turning to the woman, the Pope said: Learn now to believe the words of the *Eternal Truth*, who declares: "The bread which I give is my flesh, and my blood is drink indeed."

THIS woman never again doubted of the real presence, and soon made great progress in virtue.

The Rev. Anthony Urbanek, who, in the years 1847 and 1848, exercised the functions of the holy ministry in the city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, gave the following account of a wonderful conversion wrought by the recital of the "Hail Mary": He frequently visited a Protestant family by the name of Pollworth, natives of Hanover, but then residing a few hours' drive from Milwaukee. After a short time Mrs. Pollworth became a Catholic, but her husband remained obstinate, and would often say that he would never become a Catholic. He would not even allow his children to be baptized, although his wife resorted to every possible means to obtain his consent. All who knew him used to say it would require nothing less than a miracle to make a Catholic of Pollworth. The priest continued his visits, and their conversation generally turned upon the truths of Catholicity. But every effort to convince Mr. Pollworth was vain; he had always a thousand objections to offer. On one of these visits, after having long and uselessly endeavored to open the eyes of his headstrong friend, Rev. Mr. Urbanek at last said: "I see well, Mr. Pollworth that I can do nothing with you." At that moment the good priest was suddenly inspired with a feeling of extraordinary confidence in the intercession of the Blessed Virgin, and, continuing to address Mr. Pollworth, he added: "But you must, at least, promise me one thing." "What may that be?" asked his friend. "I will tell you, after you have made me the promise," answered Rev. Mr. Urbanek. "It is not difficult, and you can conscientiously do it." After a good deal of argument, Mr. Pollworth finally promised to



do what the priest would ask of him. "Then," said the priest, "promise me to say every Sunday one 'Hail Mary' for my intention, and you will soon experience a great change in your feelings." Mr. Pollworth laughed at these words; but he kept his promise faithfully. About fourteen days after the promise was made, Pollworth said one day abruptly to his wife: "I am going to Milwaukee, to buy some new clothes for the children." The astonished wife asked: "But why at this time so particularly?" "Well, I have at last made up my mind to have the children baptized," was his reply. The news spread like wild-fire through the entire neighborhood. "Pollworth has, at length, consented to have his children baptized," was the town-talk.

Pollworth requested the Rev. Mr. Urbanek to have the ceremony performed with the greatest solemnity. The reverend pastor invited another priest and two clerics to assist at the baptism, which took place before High Mass. After Mass, the most Blessed Sacrament was exposed and the hymn *Pange Lingua* sung by the choir. The newly-baptized children stood close to the altar steps, and their father immediately behind them. During the singing of the hymn, it suddenly occurred to Mr. Pollworth to look at the Blessed Sacrament; but being forced to stand, on account of the immense crowd that pressed around him, he feared that if he gazed fixedly at the sacred host it might have the appearance of irreverence. However, he was not long able to resist the interior impulse that urged him. He looked towards the altar and saw the sacred host as it always is; but it soon increased to the size of a mill-stone, and in the centre there appeared the good Shepherd with a lamb upon his shoulders. This sight did

not perplex the man: he wished to convince himself of the truth of what he saw. He accordingly closed one eye for a while, and thus looked at the apparition, and then again with both eyes, until he was fully satisfied that there was no illusion. Besides, it was broad daylight, and he was standing scarcely two steps from the altar. After the lapse of about five minutes, the vision disappeared, and the sacred host resumed its original appearance. On leaving the church, Pollworth asked some of his neighbors whether they had noticed anything unusual during the divine service; but when he perceived that they knew nothing of the apparition, he said no more. Next day, he invited the priest to pay him a visit, and as soon as Rev. Mr. Urbanek entered the house, Pollworth said: "Now, indeed, is the lost sheep at last found, after its long straying among the briers. I wish to become a Catholic." A few days later he was received into the Church, and after he had made his profession of faith, he solemnly attested on oath the truth of what we have related. On the same day a bigoted Calvinist was baptized. He was converted by the simple recital of Mr. Pollworth. The Right Rev. Bishop granted to the congregation of the church, in which this apparition took place, the privilege of having, every year, on the sixteenth of July, the day of the apparition, a solemn procession of the Blessed Sacrament, exactly as on Corpus Christi. Pollworth and his family always go to holy communion on this day.

SEVENTEENTH MEANS.—*The supernatural effects of Holy Communion proclaim the Real Presence.*

Our Lord says, in the Gospel, that we cannot gather grapes from thorns, nor figs from thistles: that is to say,

there must be a certain relation between the effect and its cause. Now, as the effects of holy communion are most admirable and divine, divine, also, must be the cause which produces them. It was from holy communion that St. Lidwina derived so much strength in her long sufferings, that she has merited to be numbered among the most patient of saints. Nor is this a solitary instance. Animated by this heavenly food, St. Lawrence braved the flames, St. Vincent the rack, St. Sebastian the shower of arrows, St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the fury of lions, and many other martyrs endured every kind of torture which the malice of the devil could invent, content if they could but return to their Saviour love for love, life for life, death for death. They embraced the very instruments of torture; yea, they even exulted and gloried in them. Now, this was an effect of the Holy Eucharist; this life-giving bread imparted to them courage and joy in every pain and trial. And as if this were not enough, as if to set the seal on the rest, Jesus Christ is sometimes pleased to make his own most sacred body supply the place of all other nourishment, and miraculously to sustain even the natural life of his servants. St. Catharine of Sienna, from Ash-Wednesday to Ascension-day, took no other food than holy communion. (Surius, 29 April.) A certain holy virgin of Rome spent five whole lents, without tasting anything else than the bread of angels. (Cacciaguerra.)

Nicholas de la Flue, for fifteen consecutive years, lived without other nourishment than the sacred body of our Lord. (Simon Majolus Canicular, Collet iv.) And St. Liberalis, bishop of Athens, fasted the entire week, taking nothing whatever, not even the Blessed Sacrament, and on Sunday his only nourishment consisted of this

heavenly food, —yet he was always strong and vigorous. (P. Nat. L. iv., Collat. Sanct. C. xciii.) Now it is evident that a little piece of bread cannot produce such supernatural strength and virtue. In holy communion, therefore, or the sacred host, is the Creator of heaven and earth, who alone, by means of holy communion, is capable of producing in the soul such wonderful effects. “Ah yes!” exclaimed a certain convert to the faith, “if I had not been convinced of the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist by unanswerable proofs, as I have been, what I experience within me at the foot of the holy altar, and more especially in holy communion, would soon dissipate all my doubts.”

“Yes,” said a very pious and learned missionary, “I have often witnessed the dispositions of numbers of good Christians who approached the sacraments during some festival or retreat. In giving them the holy communion, in seeing their profound recollection, the piety, the heavenly joy depicted on their countenances; aware of the generous efforts of those souls to be reconciled to God, to free themselves from their passions, to give to others what charity or justice demanded of them, to live in peace and faithfully perform all their duties; knowing the delicacy of their consciences and their anxiety to prepare themselves worthily to receive this divine sacrament—‘No, no!’ said I to myself with eyes bathed in tears, God alone can make such deep impressions on the soul; God alone can thus absorb our minds and make us forget all creatures; God alone can thus calm the most violent passions; God alone can so change hearts, draw them to him, and constitute their happiness here below!’ I have often wished that our separated brethren, those who are enemies of the



Eucharist, could witness this edifying spectacle,—they would soon be converted.”

Our God is indeed a hidden God, as the Prophet Isaias calls him: and nowhere is he more hidden than in the Blessed Eucharist. But he is only a hidden God in this mystery to those who love him not. To those who truly love him, he makes himself known in their hearts, as he has promised in the Gospel: “I shall make myself known to them.” (John xiv., 21.) The appearances under which he conceals himself are sufficiently transparent to the eyes of the faithful soul to make her thrill with joy in his presence, and to plunge her into the contemplation of his infinite love for man, like the seraphim who bask in the rays of his eternal splendor. In the moment of holy communion, the soul, all inflamed with love for her Saviour, sees him, knows him and touches him. “Such a soul touches him,” says St. Bernard, “with the hands, and embraces him with the arms of love.” She speaks to him, listens to him, answers him, and the presence of the Lord in her heart gives her a foretaste of the happiness of the blessed.

Such, then, are some of the wonderful means employed by Jesus Christ to confirm our faith in his real presence in the Blessed Sacrament. To this grand truth more than to any other do the words of the Gospel apply: “And the apostles went forth and preached everywhere, the Lord working withal, and confirming the word with the signs that followed.” (John xx., 30, 31.) Not one of the truths preached by the apostles has been confirmed by more striking miracles than that of the real presence. We can say, in truth, with St. John the Evangelist: “Many other signs also did Jesus (in confirmation of the real presence) in the sight of his disciples (and even of multitudes of people)

which are not written in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus Christ the Son of God (is present in the Holy Eucharist), and that believing you may have life in his name." (John xx., 30, 31.)

#### V. HOW THE FAITH IN THE REAL PRESENCE IS PRESERVED AND INCREASED.

One day, two men were disputing about the possession of a piece of land. So they went to the Emperor Otho, that he might settle the dispute. Each of them said: "The land belongs to me." Now, how did the emperor settle the dispute? He gave to the one, out of his own purse, the value of the piece of land, and to the other the land itself, and thus satisfied both.

A similar, but far more wonderful, act of liberality took place at Jerusalem eighteen centuries ago. Our divine Redeemer having lived on this earth over thirty years, and the time having come for him to leave this earth and return to his heavenly Father, there arose, as it were, a dispute between heaven and earth. The angels wished to have their Lord and God with them in heaven. Men, on the other hand, desired to detain their divine Master with them on earth. They felt very sad when he told them that the time had come for him to leave them. Now, how did our dear Saviour settle this dispute? He satisfied the angels by ascending to heaven; and he satisfied men by remaining invisibly with them in the Blessed Sacrament. Thus, neither the angels in heaven nor men on earth have any reason to repeat the complaint of the prophet, "O my God, wherefore art thou far from me?"

The tabernacle in our churches does not contain, like the ark of the covenant, the perishable records of the

past mercies of God. It encloses the living God himself, the Creator of heaven and earth.—“It is the Lord.” The pure eyes of St. John speedily recognized his divine Master when he appeared to his apostles after his resurrection. “It is the Lord!” he exclaimed. Our Lord is recognized by the beloved disciple because the pure heart easily penetrates those veils which surround his holy and glorious humanity. At the altar it is also the purest and most loving souls that enjoy the most intimate and consoling sense of his sacred presence; the outward appearances under which he hides himself are sufficiently transparent to their eyes; they touch, they embrace Jesus in mutual love, and no sooner do they behold the sacred host than they exclaim, “It is the Lord!”

Now such a lively faith in the real presence is nourished and increased by the constant remembrance of our dear Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and by making frequent acts of faith in his real presence. To become virtuous we must constantly perform acts of virtue. To become patient we must often make acts of patience. To become obedient and chaste we must often practise those virtues. In like manner, to become strong in our faith in the real presence, we must often make acts of faith in the real presence. Make these acts at home: kneel down in your room; turn toward some church in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept, and say: “My Jesus, I firmly believe that thou art present in yonder church; I sincerely wish to be with thee; but since this is impossible, I beseech thee to give thy blessing to me and to all men.” Make such acts of faith when you are abroad or when you are at your work; turn from time to time toward the Blessed Sacrament, and say: “My amiable

Saviour, bless me and everything that I do; I will do and suffer everything for love of thee." Make such acts of faith on your way to church. Say to yourself: "I am going to visit the King of heaven and earth; I am going to see my good Jesus, my amiable Saviour, who died on the cross for me, a wretched sinner; I am going to visit the best of fathers, who even considers it a favor when I have recourse to him in my necessities."

Finally, rouse your faith when you are in church. Kneel with profound reverence and adore your God and Creator, saying: "My God, I firmly believe that thou art in this tabernacle. I believe that in the Blessed Sacrament the same God is present who created heaven and earth out of nothing; the same God who became an infant for my sake; who, after his death and resurrection, ascended into heaven, and now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; the same who, at the end of the world, will come in great majesty to judge the living and the dead."

This, then, is the first rule—to make many acts of faith. The second is—to keep yourself free from sin; for God will not bestow the gift of a lively faith on a soul that is dead in sin. The third and most efficacious means to gain a strong faith in the real presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is—to pray for it. "He that asketh receiveth." Hence, if you wish to have a lively faith in this mystery, a faith that will make you exult when in the presence of the Holy Eucharist, or even when you think of it—ask it of Jesus Christ, and be assured that you will receive it. But since this lively faith is a gift of inestimable value, Jesus Christ wishes that we should ask for it again and again without ceasing. Pray, therefore, for a



lively faith until you have obtained it; and when you have obtained this great gift, continue to pray that it may never be taken from you. Offer this prayer especially during Mass. Hear Mass frequently, and especially in the time between the consecration and the communion, beseech Jesus Christ to grant your petition, and doubt not in the least that you will obtain it.

A young cleric once heard a missionary preach on the real presence, and on the great love of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The preacher spoke with as lively a faith as if he saw Jesus Christ with his eyes. The young man was struck at this, and said to himself: "O my Lord! what will become of me? I, too, must one day preach on thy presence in the Holy Eucharist; but how feeble will my words be in comparison with the words of this pious priest!" The young man related this afterwards, and he added that, from that time forward, he always begged of Jesus Christ the gift of a lively faith in the real presence, and that he did so frequently during Mass, particularly at the time of the elevation. By this means his faith became so strong that he afterwards besought our Lord *not* to appear to him in any sensible manner; and he could find nowhere so much joy and contentment of heart as in a church where the Blessed Sacrament was preserved.

## VI. WHY JESUS CHRIST INSTITUTED THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.

### 23. Why did Jesus Christ institute the Blessed Sacrament?

*Jesus Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament: 1, To be visited and adored in this great mystery; 2, To continue to offer himself for us in the holy sacrifice of the Mass; 3, To give himself as food to our souls in holy communion.*

1. *Jesus Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament to be visited and adored in this great mystery.*

In olden times, God complained that the Jews did not know him: "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib: but Israel hath not known me, and my people hath not understood." And when our divine Saviour came on earth, he repeated the same reproach. When Philip said to our Lord, at the Last Supper: "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us," our Saviour reproached him, saying: "Have I been so long with you and you have not known me? Philip, he that seeth me, seeth the Father also." In the same manner does our dear Saviour, hidden under the sacramental veil, seem to reproach us: "I, your God and Redeemer, have been so long with you in the Blessed Sacrament, and yet you do not know me! Do you not know that when you see the Blessed Sacrament, you see me, your Jesus? Do you not know that when you are in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, you are in my divine presence?" Alas! this reproach is but too just. How true are the words of the Evangelist: "He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not."

Once, a Jewess carried her temerity and hardihood so far as to receive holy communion with the Christians. Her audacity was immediately detected, although, when she had received the sacred host, she bowed down most profoundly, covering her face with her hands, as though wrapped in the purest devotion. "Well," you will say, "How did she betray herself?" Those who were near her noticed that she was keeping the sacred host in her mouth, and treating it with irreverence. She acted thus

in order to ridicule and dishonor Jesus Christ, the God of the Christians. The observers concluded that she must be either a sorceress, or, as was really the case, an unbelieving Jewess.

In what does her conduct differ from that of many Christians of our day? Do we not see men who hardly bow their head, much less bend the knee, when passing before that most august sacrament? Women enter the church who, by their dress and thoughtlessness, betray too plainly their lack of Christian modesty. Men gaze around wantonly, heedless of the penetrating eye of God who dwells within the tabernacle and whose penetrating glance pierces their souls.

Sacred God! what a heinous crime! to choose the most sacred place, to select the most holy time, in order to excite the most shameful passions! To choose the temple of the living God, to select the time of the most awful sacrifice, in order to foster impure desires, in order to find occasions of sin, which common decency would forbid even in the ball-room! Good God! what blindness, what madness, to sin in the very presence, before the very eyes of your eternal Judge! Such behavior before the Blessed Sacrament, is evidently the result of the most complete indifference towards Jesus Christ, or of a total forgetfulness of his presence. Shall I then call these persons Jews? shall I call them sorcerers? No. But, most assuredly, they have not a lively faith. They may be Catholics, if you will, but, certainly, their faith is not practical. They do not *realize* that Jesus Christ is present in the tabernacle and in the remonstrance. They are deceived by their senses. In the remonstrance, or in the hands of the priest at Mass, they see nothing but the white host, and their

thoughts penetrate no farther. But if they only reflected on what their faith teaches, viz., that under that little host Jesus Christ conceals his heavenly splendor and glory, how different would be their deportment! how different their thoughts and feelings! Would you know how they would act if they had a lively faith? Go to the palace of a king. Mark the silent expectation in that splendid apartment! What mean those movements so circumspect? that tread so noiseless? that voice so subdued? Ah! 'tis the royal antechamber! There, a loud word is an impertinence; there, unbecoming attire is a crime. But, hark! even that stealthy conversation is hushed; every eye is turned to one point, each one assumes the most respectful attitude, the curtain is drawn, and the obsequious courtiers stand in the presence of their king. What an unpardonable breach of decorum would it not be for any one to remain sitting at a moment like this! Yes, to talk, to laugh, or to remain with the head covered!

Now, if such honor is paid to earthly princes, what reverence, then, is due to him who is "King of kings and Lord of lords?" St. John Chrysostom is indignant with us for even making the comparison, and with reason. For what is an emperor when compared to the King of heaven and earth? He is less than a blade of grass compared to the whole universe.

Alas! ever since the time of the so-called Reformation, dark clouds of error and doubt have settled thickly around the throne of our dear Saviour in the Holy Eucharist.

Who could believe that Jesus Christ is present in this sacrament, and fail in reverence and homage towards him? What reverence did not the Jews pay to the ark of the covenant! No one dared approach it; fifty thousand



persons who, through curiosity, ventured to gaze thereat, were struck dead, in punishment for their rashness! (1 Kings, vi., 19.) Yet, what did the ark contain? "A golden pot that had manna, and the rod of Aaron that had blossomed, and the tables of the covenant." (Heb. ix., 1.) But in the Holy Eucharist, God himself is present: he who made all things out of nothing, and can destroy them in a moment; he who, at the last day, will come on the clouds of heaven to judge the living and the dead.

The homage, therefore, which he deserves in this august sacrament is that of supreme adoration. The fathers of the Council of Trent, when speaking of the worship and veneration to be paid to the Blessed Sacrament, say :

"There is no doubt that all the faithful, according to the custom ever received in the Catholic Church, should venerate this most holy sacrament with the same worship which belongs to the one true God. Nor should it be less honored because it was instituted by Christ our Lord to be our food. For we believe that in this holy sacrament is present that same God of whom the Eternal Father, when introducing him into the world, says: "Let all the angels of God adore him (Ps. cxvi., 7); whom the Magi, falling down, adored (Matt. ii., 11); and whom, finally, the apostles, as Holy Scripture testifies, adored in Galilee." (Trid. Conc. sess. xiii., c. v.)

The homage, therefore, which we owe to our Lord in this mystery, is that of supreme adoration: a homage which we cannot, without sacrilege, give to any creature. His body and blood are truly and really present there, subsisting in his divine person. As God, he is one with the Father; as man, his human nature having a divine subsistence is likewise adored. Hence, St. Augustine says:

“Let no one eat that flesh, without having first adored it. Not only do we commit no sin in worshipping it, but we should be guilty of sin, were we to fail to worship it.” (Enarr. in Ps. xcvi.) St. Chrysostom, addressing the lukewarm Christian, who, insensible to the attractions of his Lord, neglects to receive or worship him, exclaims: “Consider, I beseech thee, the royal banquet is prepared: angels minister at the table; the King himself is present, and dost thou remain listless? Adore and communicate.” (Hom. iii. in epist. ad Eph.)

Now, there are several devotions to the Blessed Sacrament. It is especially at these devotions that we should pay to our Lord the homage of supreme adoration. One of these devotions is the one common enough in Catholic countries, but which can seldom be practised in our own: viz., the devotion of attending the Blessed Sacrament when carried through the streets to the sick, or joining in the more solemn processions of the Blessed Sacrament which are made on the feast of Corpus Christi and at other times. In this country, such processions, publicly made, might expose the Blessed Sacrament to insult and profanation from the unbelieving multitude, and so the Blessed Sacrament is generally carried to the sick, in silence and secrecy; and public processions, except under very favorable circumstances, are omitted, out of reverence for our Lord in this great mystery. But in countries where the population is mostly Catholic, there is no devotion to the Blessed Sacrament more natural than that of escorting the priest who bears in his hands the body of our Lord. Were our Lord again upon this earth in his visible human form, he would be attended, wherever he went, by crowds of the faithful, who, out of reverence and love, would eagerly

draw near him, and show him every mark of respect. It is, therefore, but natural for us to show our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament the greatest reverence and love, even though we cannot see him with the eyes of the body.

One day, whilst the Blessed Sacrament was being carried a great distance to a sick person, Philip II, king of Spain, accompanied it all the way, on foot. The priest, observing this, asked him if he were not tired. "Tired!" replied the king, "behold! my servants wait upon me day and night, and never yet have I heard one of them complain of being tired. Shall I, then, complain of fatigue when I am waiting upon my Lord and my God, whom I can never sufficiently serve and honor?" On such occasions, the king always dispensed with regal pomp and pageantry, and, as an ordinary personage, mingled with the common throng. Inclemency of weather deterred him not from paying this tribute of honor to his Lord. One day, as he was devoutly accompanying the Blessed Sacrament, with uncovered head, a page held his hat over him, to shield him from the burning sun. "Never mind," said Philip, "the sun will do me no harm; at such a time as this we must regard neither rain nor wind, neither heat nor cold."

Rudolph, count of Hapsburg, whilst hunting, one day, observed a priest carrying the viaticum to the sick, whereupon he immediately alighted, and insisted on the priest mounting his charger. The offer was accepted. The priest, having performed his sacred task returned the animal to the count, with many marks of gratitude. But this noble Christian count refused to take back his stud. "No," said he, "keep it, for I am not worthy to ride upon a beast of burden which has had the honor of bearing my Lord." (Heiss's History of Austria.)

Whilst the Lutheran heresy was spreading its ravages throughout Germany, Charles V, of Spain, hastened to Augsburg to assist at the Diet convened there to stem the pernicious influence of this heresy. The feast of Corpus Christi fell at the time. It was celebrated with every possible pomp and magnificence; the Emperor Charles assisted thereat with the most edifying devotion. At the procession, the Prince Bishop of Mayence carried the most adorable sacrament, being supported on the right by Ferdinand, the Roman king, and on the left by Joachim, elector of Brandenburg. The canopy was borne by six princes, namely : Louis, duke of Bavaria; the son of the elector of Brandenburg; George, duke of Pomerania; Philip, count palatine of Werdelburg; Henry, duke of Brunswick, and the duke of Mecklenburg. When these six princes had carried it as far as the chapel on Mount Berlach, six others took it and carried it to a place called Holy Cross, whence six others bore it to the cathedral. The Emperor Charles followed the procession during the entire route. He went on foot, with uncovered head, bearing a torch in his hand. He was accompanied by several archbishops, bishops, and many persons of high rank.

Such noble traits of devotion are not confined to days gone by; in our own times we see princes who have inherited from their fathers this true devotion to the most holy sacrament. Of the present emperor of Austria it is related, that one day as he was riding through the streets of Vienna, at the signal announcing that the Blessed Sacrament was being carried to the sick, he immediately stopped his carriage, alighted, and, on bended knees, devoutly adored his Lord and God. The same is related of that excellent princess, the late queen of Belgium,



It is true, that, before him who dwells concealed under the sacramental veils, princes are as nothing. Why, then, should we look on their devotion as something extraordinary? It is true, these princes are as nothing before our Lord, but they are great and mighty when compared to us, and may well serve to remind us of the obligation which faith imposes upon us. If, then, those whose position bespeaks honor and ease cheerfully submit to humiliation, inconvenience, and pain, at the call of religion, what ought not we to do? We cannot boast of high position to make us proud, luxury to make us effeminate, or gentle care to make us tender. On the contrary, our position bows us to humility, our necessity and poverty bend us to labor, our life accustoms us to forego our ease. This being the case, whilst we honor the great ones of the earth, shall we refuse to join with them in worshipping him who is the source of all greatness, and who is above all?

Another form of devotion to our hidden Lord is the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. There are two forms of exposition. When the Blessed Sacrament is exposed for a short time, as, for example, after Mass or Vespers, or as a short evening service, it is called Benediction; because the benediction, or blessing, which is always given at the end of every exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, becomes, as it were, the most important part of the service. Benediction is, therefore, a short and less solemn form of exposition. The other and most solemn form of exposition is the "Forty Hours' Devotion." In the sixteenth century, when the doctrine of the real presence was rejected and blasphemed, the zeal of St. Charles Borromeo prompted him to institute at Milan public exercises, continued during two entire days, in honor of the Blessed Sacrament. By

this means he sought to attract to the churches faithful and devout worshippers, at a time when the votaries of the world were engaged in the vain amusements and criminal excesses of the Carnival. Pope Clement VIII, to apply a remedy to the public calamities of the Church, ordained, in 1592, that the Forty Hours' Devotion should be successively observed in all the churches of Rome, beginning in the Papal chapel, on the first Sunday of Advent; in order that the faithful of Rome might always find the Blessed Sacrament exposed for veneration in some one of the churches, and thus have an opportunity to pour out their prayers before the Lord, and to implore his mercy in all their necessities. Pope Clement VIII. also granted indulgences to all the faithful who would visit a church where the Blessed Sacrament was exposed, and recite there some prayers. Pope Paul V, in 1606, confirmed and established for ever this devotion. It soon became a favorite exercise, and was promoted with great zeal by St. Philip Neri at Rome, and by St. Francis de Sales in his apostolic missions in Chablais. Throughout Italy, Spain, Germany, France, and other countries it has long been practised with great advantage to religion, as also in various parts of the United States.

Whenever the Blessed Sacrament is thus publicly and solemnly exposed for adoration, our infallible faith says to us: "Ecce Rex vester!" "Behold your King." Behold your Redeemer, your Judge, your Creator, your Lord and your God! Behold him there, seated, as it were, on his throne of love and mercy, to receive your public homage, and to give audience to all who come to him. Present yourselves before him and sing with the cherubim: "Holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts; the heavens and the earth are full of thy glory." Greet your Redeemer with the devout

Israelites : " Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Invite, with holy fervor, all creatures to join in your homage : " Blessed be the name of his Majesty for ever, and the whole earth shall be filled with his majesty. So be it, so be it." (Ps. lxxi., 19.) Say, with the glorified spirits : " Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, honor and power, and strength, to our God, for ever and ever. Amen." (Apoc. vii., 12.) Exclaim with the prophet : " The Lord is in his temple : let all the earth be silent before him." (Hab. ii., 20.) Say with St. Paul : " If any one love not our Lord Jesus Christ, let him be anathema." (1 Cor. xvi., 22.)

Behold your good Shepherd exposed amidst a brilliant display of lights. These lights are intended to represent, in a sensible manner, that Jesus is the Light of the world ; they are intended to raise your minds to the contemplation of his glory in the heavenly Jerusalem, the Lamb being the lamp thereof. See how all external light is excluded. See how the images and pictures are all covered, to remind you that you should direct and concentrate your entire devotion on Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and that your minds should be employed in holy meditation on the goodness, love and mercy, of your most holy Redeemer. Such is the purpose of the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. Ah ! let Catholics believe this with a lively faith, and our churches will be filled with worshippers whose deportment will correspond to their belief. The modest attire, the guarded eye, the bended knee, the meekly-folded hands, will bespeak the conviction of their hearts. Let Catholics have a lively faith in this mystery, and Jesus Christ will seldom be left alone. At all hours, his children will come to present themselves before him, as subjects before their prince, as a sick man before his physician,

as a child before his father,—in a word, as a friend before his beloved friend. Let a congregation be animated with a lively faith in this mystery of our holy religion, and each mind will be filled with amazement, the spirit will be recollected, the soul moved to contrition, the affections inflamed, the eye melted to tears of tenderness, and the voice broken with sobs like those of the poor publican: “O God be merciful to me a sinner!” or like unto that of St. Peter: “Lord, retire from me, for I am a sinful man!”

When our Lord is thus exposed for our veneration, let us address him in words like the following :

Speak, Lord, thy servant hears,

O, loving Jesu !

O, loving Jesu !

Dispel my doubts and fears,

Merciful Jesu !

Speak, speak to my sad heart,

My Life, my Hope thou art,

Kind, loving Jesu !

Merciful Jesu !

Let me thy sweet voice hear,

O, loving Jesu !

O, loving Jesu !

No scoffer, Lord, is near ;

Merciful Jesu !

Has thy Heart nought to tell ?

True love can speak so well.

Kind, loving Jesu !

Merciful Jesu !

Thy sheep should hear thy voice,

O, loving Jesu !

O, loving Jesu !

Let my heart, too, rejoice,

Merciful Jesu !

The dead are silent all,—

Death holds not *thee* in thrall,

Kind, loving Jesu !

Merciful Jesu !



Speak with that gentle voice,  
O, loving Jesu !  
O, loving Jesu !  
That charmed fair Paradise ;  
Merciful Jesu !  
Speak with that voice of love,  
That thrills the blest above,  
Kind, loving Jesu !  
Merciful Jesu !

There is still another form of devotion to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament ; it is the pious custom of visiting him in this mystery of love. This devout practice is familiar to good Catholics. When our Lord was living upon earth, he was visited by the Magi who came from a distance, and by the Shepherds who came from the neighborhood. He was visited by Nicodemus who came for instruction, and by Magdalen who came to obtain pardon. In like manner, pious Catholics visit our Lord now to obtain all kinds of favors spiritual and temporal. But, alas ! how many there are who but seldom or never visit Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament ! They resemble Jutta, the niece of the Empress St. Cunegunda, who stayed at home once, without any plausible excuse, whilst the Blessed Sacrament was exposed in the church. St. Cunegunda, filled with holy indignation at this indifference, gave her niece a severe slap on the cheek. Our Lord, in punishment of Jutta's indifference towards him, allowed the print of Cunegunda's fingers to remain indelibly stamped on her face. This was a life-long monitor for her. Such a monitor, however, is not given to every one to remind him of his duty of visiting and adoring Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament ; I will, therefore, set forth some reasons which ought to induce every faithful soul to show her fervor, gratitude and love for her divine Saviour, by often visiting him in this mystery

of love, and by praying to him, not only for herself, but especially for all those who are cold and indifferent towards the excessive love and patience of their God hidden under the sacramental species.

¶ If there be one thing which, more than all others, ought to induce us to visit Jesus Christ often in the church, it is the thought of the excessive love which he bears to us in this adorable mystery of his love. "It is," says he, "my delight to stay with the children of men." (Prov. viii., 31.)

What could have induced our dear Lord, to stay with us on earth in the Blessed Sacrament? Was it to gain honor? Alas! our good Lord receives the same treatment in the Blessed Eucharist that he received during the thirty-three years in which he lived upon earth. When, upon earth, he was made light of, it was said of him: "Is he not the son of a carpenter?" "Why do you listen to him?" said the Pharisees. "Do you not see that he has a devil, that he is possessed, that he is a wine-drinker and a friend of sinners?" They bound him, scourged him, crowned him with thorns, and at last, making him carry his own cross, they crucified him. Such was the honor which Jesus Christ received when living among men! And has he not been treated in the same manner, in the Blessed Sacrament, even to the present day? Instead of being honored by all men, as he deserves, he is dishonored and insulted. Some do not think of him, for weeks together; others walk carelessly into the church, as if they had no faith, and make their genuflection before him as if they wished to mock him; others behave in church as if they were in their own houses. In many churches there is not even a lamp kept burning; and how often have the

consecrated hosts been trodden under foot, or thrown into the fire by heretics, Jews, and other wicked wretches!

Such has been the treatment which Jesus has received from men—contempt, mockery and insult, coldness and indifference! Certainly, human honors could not have induced our Lord to remain with us! What then induced him to stay with us in the Holy Eucharist? Was it perhaps to increase his own happiness? By no means. His happiness is so great that it cannot be increased. He has risen from the dead; he is glorified; he sits at the right hand of God the Father, and has all power in heaven and on earth. The angels serve him; men are his subjects; the devils tremble at his presence; every knee must bend before him, of those that are in heaven, on earth and under the earth, in purgatory and in hell. What, then, is wanting to his happiness? Nothing. Since, therefore, our Lord cannot become happier by remaining with us, and since he does not receive due honor among us, what, I ask, once more, could have induced him to abide here so long: to remain on earth for eighteen hundred years,—yea, even until the end of the world, to be present in the Blessed Sacrament in every place, in every parish church in America, Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, in the isles of the sea, and even sometimes in the midst of the ocean itself? Ah! Christian soul, there was no other motive than love,—the great, the excessive love of Jesus Christ towards men!

Yes, it was love, love alone, nothing but love, which induced Jesus, our Redeemer, to remain among us in the Blessed Sacrament.

In order to conceive, in some measure, the love of Jesus Christ in this wonderful sacrament, let us consider

*the time* at which he gave himself to us as our food and drink. Jesus might have instituted this sacrament when, in the twelfth year of his age, he travelled to Jerusalem, or at the wedding of Cana, or when he was thirty years old and began to teach publicly, or he might have instituted it after his resurrection. But he chose, for the time of its institution, the last moment of his earthly career. Why did he wait so long? Why did he not institute it sooner or later? Why not after his resurrection? Why just at the moment when he was about to take leave of the apostles and quit the earth? He instituted this sacrament at the last moment of his life, in order that men might the better see the excess of his love. Do you ask how this is? To make it clearer, imagine a father who has in store costly presents of gold and jewels which he intends to give to his children, in order to show them how much he loves them. What time do you think this father will choose for bestowing these gifts, as being best calculated to make a deep impression on them? He will wait until he is on his death-bed, and then he will bestow his gifts, that they may be the last memorials of his love.

Behold, our divine Saviour thought and acted in the very same manner. He said to himself, I have already given men so many proofs of my love toward them: I have created them; I preserve their lives; I have become man,—for their sake I became a child; I have lived among them for more than thirty years; I am yet to suffer and die for them on the cross and to re-open heaven to them; what more can I do for them? Ah! I can make them one more present. I will give them a most precious gift; I will give them all that I have, so that they may not be able to charge me with having done less for them than I could have done.



I will give them myself as a legacy ; I will give them my divinity and my humanity, my body and my soul,—myself, entirely and without reserve. I will make them this present at the last moment of my life ; at a time when men are accustomed to bequeath to those whom they love that which they value most. At the very moment when they are seeking to betray me ; at the very moment when the Pharisees and Jews are planning to remove me out of the world, I will give myself to men on earth, to be their food and drink ; to abide with them in the Blessed Sacrament in a wonderful manner ; to be always among them, by dwelling in their churches. Instead of withdrawing my love from them on account of their ingratitude, I will manifest it to them only the more.

O wonderful love of God ! Who could ever have imagined that God would go so far in his love for ungrateful men, as to give them his own flesh and blood as the food of their souls ! What man or angel would ever have conceived such condescension ! And supposing it had occurred to some man or angel, to wish that God would do so, who would have dared to express such a wish, or to ask such a thing of God ? Would not the thought have been immediately banished from the mind, as sacrilegious ? Now, what the angels could never have conceived, nor men dared to ask, the immense love of God has given to us unasked.

Our Lord was right in saying to his disciples when they became sad, on account of his approaching departure, “ Let not your hearts be troubled ; I will not leave you orphans.” A good mother, on her death-bed, says to her weeping children : “ Dear children, I must now die, and leave you. I recommend you to God, and to the protection of your blessed Mother, Mary. Avoid sin, and act

always as good children, that I may have the happiness of seeing you again in the other world." But Jesus does not speak thus to his apostles. He says: "You need not be sad, because I am about to leave the world. I will remain always with you in my most holy sacrament. I will give you a power than which there is no greater in heaven or on earth—that of changing bread into my body, and wine into my blood. In virtue of this power you can always have me with you. You need only pronounce the words of consecration over the bread and wine, and in that very moment I will be with you, and you will hold me in your hands. O love! O love of God towards us! O Jesus, indeed thou lovest us too much! Thou couldst not endure that we should be left alone in this world; and, that even death might not be able to separate thee from us, thou didst leave thyself to us as our food in the Blessed Sacrament!

O good Lord! O great God! how humbly dost thou hide thyself for our sake!

Thou hidest thy majesty, thy might,  
Thou hidest thy glory's dazzling light,  
Thou hidest thyself with God-like art,  
*Thou canst not hide thy loving Heart!*

But, alas! how much is thy bounty and love abused! Not only do sinners despise thee in this sacrament of thy love, but the good also, the just, treat thee with indifference and coldness. Thou hast been so long with them, and they with thee, and yet for want of a lively faith, they do not know thee. So long hast thou been with us, and there are so few who seem to know it, so few who are penetrated with a sense of the unspeakable happiness of possessing thee. I hear thee complain of us, O dear Jesus, as thou didst one day complain to the blessed Margaret Alacoque, when showing to her thy heart crowned with thorns:

“Behold this heart of mine, so full of love for men, that it has shed its last drop of blood for them. I have given them my own flesh and blood as food and drink for their souls; and yet consider how this heart receives from most men, in return for so great love, nothing but ingratitude and contempt! But what grieves me most is, that I am thus treated even by good and virtuous souls.”

Do you understand, dear Christian, the just complaint of your divine Saviour? Is your heart not touched by it? “Behold,” says he, “behold this heart which loves men so excessively; this heart which is always pouring out graces upon them; this heart, so full of pity to receive sinners, to help the poor and needy, to cure the sick, to console the afflicted, to hear the prayers of all men, whenever they come to ask; this heart which is almost beside itself with love—this heart is not known, it is despised: and, what causes me the keenest pang of all, my love is forgotten, even by those souls into which I have so often entered in holy communion.

Ah! dear Christian, have you a heart? Well, if it be not of stone or iron, let it be moved by this affecting complaint of the heart of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. Give to your God and Saviour what is due to him. Repay him for the benefit of your creation; repay him for the benefit of your redemption; for the benefit of your preservation; for the pains of his scourging; for the agony of his crucifixion; but, above all, repay him, yes, repay him in some measure, for the excessive love which he bears you in the Blessed Sacrament.

“But, how?” you will ask; “how shall I repay my Jesus for his love to me? What can I give him in return?” Nothing but *love*. Love demands love, and is contented only with love. But it must be *true love*, that is, such love

as animates you to keep his commandments, and to avoid sin; such love as impels you to receive him often in holy communion, and still oftener to visit him in the church; such love as causes you to kneel down in your room, if circumstances permit, and turn toward some church in which the Blessed Sacrament is kept, and say: "My Jesus, I believe that thou art present in yonder church.

My heart e'er turns to thee,  
Life of my soul!  
Though far I'm near to thee,  
Joy of my soul!  
Where'er on earth I roam  
'Neath heaven's starry dome,  
Where thou art is my home,  
Spouse of my soul!  
'Mid sullen ocean's roar,  
Life of my soul!  
'Mid forests old and hoar,  
Joy of my soul!  
Down by the lonely glen,  
'Mid busy haunts of men,  
My heart turns e'er again  
Only to thee!

The sun shines bright and fair,  
Life of my soul!  
Sweet odors fill the air,  
Joy of my soul!  
The birds sing loud and clear;  
But nought to me is dear,  
Till thou, sweet Lord, art near,  
Spouse of my soul!

Ah me! how passing strange,  
Life of my soul!  
That men the world should range,  
Joy of my soul!  
In pain and sore distress,  
E'er seeking happiness,  
When thou art here to bless,  
Spouse of my soul!



Sweet Jesu, hidden Guest,  
 Life of my soul!  
 Come, rest within my breast,  
 Joy of my soul!  
 To me thy love impart,  
 From me ne'er more depart,  
 O, fill my aching heart,  
 Spouse of my soul! 1

Another reason which should urge us to visit often Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament is the great number of our temporal and spiritual wants. In the temple at Jerusalem, and in the tabernacle in the desert, there was a divine presence to which Moses and the priests could ever have recourse in times of doubt and difficulty. Now, in the tabernacles of our churches, Jesus Christ himself dwells, in order that his faithful people may come to him with their requests and have recourse to him in their troubles. "Come," he says, "all ye that labor and are burdened, and I will refresh you." (St Matt. xi., 28.) Ought we not to consider it a great favor to be invited to the presence of Jesus? Surely, we ought to find our delight in his company, since he is delighted to be in ours. We ought to go to him frequently and say to him: "My Jesus, why dost thou love me so much? What good dost thou see in me that thou art so enamored of me? Hast thou already forgotten the sins by which I have offended thee so grievously? O how can I love anything else than thee, my Jesus and my all? No one has ever done so much to make me happy as thou hast, O amiable, O most amiable Jesus! Never let me love anything but thee."

Jesu, joy of my sad heart,  
 All my hope, my life thou art;  
 Far from thee all joy is gloom,  
 Near thee, e'en bleak deserts bloom.  
 Where shall I on earth e'er find

Friend so patient, true, and kind?  
Where shall I find sweeter rest  
Than thy pure and loving breast?  
Hide me in thy wounded heart  
And to me thy love impart!  
In blest childhood's holy hour  
My heart felt thy love's sweet pow'r.  
Ah, that I had never strayed  
From the choice my soul then made!  
Music sweet and roses bright,  
Crowns of glory, dreams of light,—  
Ah, these led me far from thee  
With their dazzling witchery!  
Jesu, let my prayers and tears  
Cleanse the stains of vanished years!  
When my weary soul looked back  
O'er the desert's dreary track,  
Thou didst seem so far, so far—  
Darkness round, no light, no star!  
Friends were far, and foes were nigh,  
Hope and gladness seemed to die!  
Then, sweet Jesu, thou didst prove  
Man may blame, but thou dost love!  
Hide me in thy wounded heart,  
From thee let me never part!

If you had a friend who always wished you well, and who had promised to help you in all your wants, and who would even take great pleasure in being able to bestow a benefit upon you, you would certainly be acting ungratefully if you did not have recourse to him in your necessities. But where, I ask, can you find a better, a more faithful, or more liberal friend than Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament? Where can you find one who more sincerely wishes you well; who consults more your advantage and happiness; who grants your petitions with greater readiness and pleasure? Ought you not, then, to feel drawn to your King and best Friend,—ought you not to show your gratitude to him?

What would you say if a rich nobleman should come and take up his abode in the neighborhood of a poor beggar, in order to be able to aid the poor man in all his necessities? What would you say of such a nobleman? "Oh!" you would exclaim, "how good, how exceedingly kind he is! He deserves to be honored, esteemed, praised and loved by all men. How happy is the poor man who has such a nobleman for his friend!" But, though none of the rich of this world has ever gone so far in his love to the poor, Jesus Christ, the King of heaven and earth, has gone even farther in his love for us poor sinners; he takes up his abode in our churches for the convenience of each one of us. O how happy are we! Would to God that each of us availed himself of this happiness by frequently visiting Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. It is thus, that the saints at least, have ever shown their gratitude. St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis, as we read in her life, visited Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament thirty-three times a day. The Countess of Feria, a fervent disciple of the venerable Father Avila, and afterwards a nun of the Order of Poor Clares, was called the Spouse of the Blessed Sacrament, from her fervent and lengthened visits to it. Being once asked what she did during the many hours which she spent before its sacred presence, she replied: "I could remain there for all eternity! Is there not in the Blessed Sacrament the very essence of God, which is the food of the blessed? Dear Lord! what do I do? Ask, rather, what do I not do? I love, praise, give thanks, and entreat. What does a beggar do in the presence of a rich man? What does a sick man do when he sees his physician? What does a thirsty man do at a cool spring? What does a starving man do at a plentiful table?"

St. Elizabeth, of Hungary, was accustomed, even in her childhood, to visit Jesus Christ often in the Blessed Sacrament. If she found the church closed, she would affectionately kiss the lock of the door and the walls of the church, for love of Jesus Christ in the most Holy Eucharist.

St. Alphonsus being unable, on account of his advanced age, to walk to the church, had himself carried thither, in order to pay his accustomed visits to his beloved Saviour.

Listen to the touching language in which he expresses his tender love for Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament :

O flowers, O happy flowers, which day and night  
So near to my own Jesus silent stay,  
And never leave him till, before his sight,  
At length your life in fragrance fades away !  
Could I, too, always make my dwelling-place  
In that dear spot to which your charms you lend,  
Oh, what a blessed lot were mine ! what grace,  
Close to my truest Life, my life to end !

O lights ! O happy lights, which burn away,  
The presence of our Jesus to proclaim,  
Ah ! could I see my heart become, one day,  
Like you, all fire of love and burning flame,—  
Then, as you waste away, so would I die,  
Like you, consumed with fire of love divine;  
Oh ! how I envy you ! How blest were I  
Could I but change your happy lot with mine ?

O sacred pyx ! thou art more favored still,  
For thou my love concealed dost here enclose;  
What nobler, happier part could creature fill ?  
In thee thy very God deigns to repose !  
Ah ! were thy office but for one brief day  
On this my poor and frozen breast bestow'd  
Then would my heart be melted all away  
Of love and fire become the blest abode.

But ah, sweet flowers, bright lights, and pyx so blest !  
Far, far more fortunate than you am I,  
When my Beloved comes within my breast  
All loving, like a tender lamb, to lie;



And I, poor worm, in this frail host receive  
My Good, my All, the God of majesty !  
Why then not burn ? my life why then not give,—  
Since here my Treasure gives himself to me ?

Away, like fluttering moth around the light,  
My raptured soul, about thy Jesus fly,  
Inflamed with faith and love; and, at the sight  
Of thy Belovèd, ever burn and sigh !  
And when the hour arrives, and he is thine  
Whose very sight makes paradise above,  
Oh, press him to thy heart with fire divine,  
And say thou wilt but love, love, only love !

Father Louis la Nuza, a great missionary of Sicily, was, even when a young student in the world, so much attached to Jesus Christ, that it seemed as if he could hardly tear himself from the presence of his beloved Lord, on account of the great delight he found there ; and being commanded by his director not to remain before the Blessed Sacrament longer than an hour at a time, when that period had elapsed it was as difficult for him to separate from the bosom of Jesus, as for an infant to tear itself from its mother's breast. The writer of his life says, that, when he was forced to leave the church, he would stand looking at the altar and turn, again and again, as if he could not take leave of his Lord, whose presence was so sweet and so consoling.

Father Salesius, of the Society of Jesus, felt consolation even in speaking of the Blessed Sacrament. He never could visit it often enough. When summoned to the gate, when returning to his room, or passing from one part of the house to another, he made use of all these opportunities to repeat his visits to his beloved Lord, so that it was remarked that scarcely an hour of the day elapsed without his visiting Jesus. At length, he merited the grace of

martyrdom at the hands of heretics, while defending the real presence in the most holy sacrament. Oh, how do these examples of the saints confound us, who have so little love for Jesus Christ and are so negligent in visiting him! Some say, "I have too much to do; I am too busy; I cannot find time." Dear Christian, do not say, "I have too much to do;" say, rather, "I have too much love and affection for the goods of this world, and too little love for Jesus Christ." You find time to eat and to drink and to sleep; you find time to amuse yourself; time for all your temporal affairs; time even to sin. Now, how is it that you find time for all these things? It is because you like them. If you appear but seldom before Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, it is an evident sign that you love him but little. Love our Lord a little more, and you will find time to visit him. Do not say, "I am too busy." The saints, too, were very busy, perhaps more so than you are, and yet they found time enough to visit their Lord. Do you imagine that you have more to think of than had St. Wenceslaus, king of Bohemia, or St. Louis, king of France? And yet because they tenderly loved Jesus Christ, their King, they found time to visit him every day. Be sure, if you do not visit Jesus Christ at all, or if you visit him but seldom, your love for him is not very great. I repeat, then, once more: Love your Lord and God in the Blessed Sacrament a little more, and I am sure you will be found oftener before the altar.

Again, do not say, "I have too much to do." It is for this very reason that you should feel obliged to visit your Saviour. The suffering and the heavy-laden are especially invited by Jesus Christ: "Come to me," he says, "all ye that labor and are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you."

Instead of being kept away from me by your numerous toils and labors, you should rather come and speak to me about them. Come and tell me all your troubles, recommend to me all your affairs, and I will bless them that they may succeed. The saints understood well that on God's blessing depends everything; they knew that if God did not bless their temporal affairs, they would not succeed, nay, that they would be even injurious and hurtful to their souls. Whenever St. Vincent of Paul had to transact any important business, he would go with the greatest confidence before the Blessed Sacrament and recommend the affair to Jesus Christ, beseeching him to give it his blessing. After he had transacted the business he would go again to the church and thank Jesus Christ for its success. Before the Blessed Sacrament St. Francis Xavier, too, found strength in all his hardships. Whilst his days were passed in saving souls, he spent the greater part of the night in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament.

St. John Francis Regis, also, used to do the same. Whenever he found the church closed, he would console himself by kneeling at the door, even in the cold and wet, that he might, at least at a distance, pay his homage to his sacramental Consoler. When any affliction befell St. Francis of Assisi, he went immediately to communicate it to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. The blessed Bertha, of Oberried in Alsace, being one day asked by one of her sisters in religion, how she could discharge so many distracting duties without prejudice to her piety, replied: "Whenever I am entrusted with an office, I go to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. He is my Comforter, my Lord and best Counsellor, and I do carefully what he inspires me to do. He governs me, and it is by him that

I govern those whom he has confided to me." Do you, O Christian, understand this language? Do you understand how to obtain the blessing of heaven upon your affairs and undertakings? Oh, were you to visit Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament only for a quarter of an hour each day, from how many trials and hardships would you be delivered; from how many accidents, misfortunes, temptations and attacks of the devil would you be preserved; how few sins would you commit, and how much more consolation and peace of heart would you enjoy!

Then indeed you would be forced to exclaim with a great saint:

I sought for wisdom's hidden treasures,  
 In ancient tomes of human lore;  
 I sought 'till heart and brain grew weary,  
 Each page was stained with tears and gore.  
 O'er all I read the one sad lesson,  
 Still taught as in the days gone by,  
 Of men's dread crimes and woeful blindness;  
 I closed the page with pitying sigh:  
 Has wisdom fled from earth forever,  
 Is truth then changed to a mocking lie?

In nature's wildest haunts I wandered,  
 My yearning soul still sought its God.  
 The stars shone on, the gay sun mocked me,  
 Earth's heart was cold, a lifeless clod!  
 I gazed entranced on nature's beauty,  
 How frail, alas! Death and decay  
 Soon changed its bloom to a desert dreary—  
 I sadly turned my gaze away.  
 Are life and love but gleaming shadows?  
 Shall beauty bloom but to decay?

Within my soul well-nigh despairing,  
 A sweet voice spake,—it thrilled my breast—  
 "O wanderer, haste to God's blest altar,  
 There shall thy yearning heart find rest."  
 O God of love and light and beauty,



That knows nor change, nor death's decay !  
My soul's true Life, my All, I've found thee,  
Permit me ne'er from thee to stray !  
O, cloudless Wisdom, long I've sought thee,  
When shall I see thy fadeless day ?

You would exclaim, "Ah! how true are the words of Jesus Christ: 'Seek first the kingdom of God, and the rest will be added unto you.'" "Ah," you would say, "since I have been in the habit of going to church every day, I labor only half as much as before, and yet I have more success than when I used to labor day and night in the sweat of my brow."

Instead of spending your time in idle, or even sinful conversation, in games and amusements, go to church and pray there for a few moments at least, that you may draw down the blessing of heaven upon yourself and your family. Rest assured, that you will experience what so many holy souls have experienced whilst before the Blessed Sacrament,—you will feel a thousand times happier in the company of Jesus Christ than in the most agreeable society in the world. Men can only afford you vain consolations, but Jesus Christ has his hands full of lasting consolations and divine graces, which he is ready to pour out upon your soul, if you will only present yourself before him.

One day, as Frederic IV, king of Prussia, was passing through the Rhenish Province, a certain cow-herd, approached the royal carriage and commenced playing as artistically as he could on his rude horn. The king, admiring the simplicity and good will of the cow-herd, presented him with a piece of money, to repay him for the loyalty he had exhibited towards his sovereign. Now, if this earthly prince so readily rewarded this slight act of respect, how much more readily will not our Lord pour

out his graces upon all those who come to honor him in the Blessed Sacrament?

One day, as the blessed Balthasar Alvarez was kneeling before the altar, our Lord appeared to him as a little child, with his hands full of precious stones, saying: "O if I could only find some one on whom I could bestow these graces!" Are you, then, in want of anything? Go to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament; he can and he will help you.

Remember the great favors granted by our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament to St. Peter of Alcantara, to St. Clare, to Maximilian I, emperor of Austria, and to so many others. [See PAGE 96.] Many similar facts are found in church history and in the lives of the saints. Now, if Jesus Christ is so ready to help us in our temporal wants, how much more readily will he bestow spiritual graces and favors upon us? Whence did St. Thomas Aquinas draw all that knowledge which enabled him to write so learnedly on every subject of our holy religion? Was it not from the Fountain of Knowledge, our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament? Whenever he had a difficulty in understanding or explaining anything, St. Thomas would go to the Blessed Sacrament, and pray there fervently until he was enlightened. Whence have so many pious souls obtained strength to resist every temptation? Was it not from the frequent visits which they paid to Jesus in the most holy sacrament? Father Thomas Sanchez, who was in the habit of visiting the church five times a day and eight times on Thursdays, used to exclaim whenever he was tempted: "Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, help me;" and no sooner had he pronounced these words than the temptation vanished. One day, a young man said to a priest of our Congregation:

“Whenever the devil assails me with bad thoughts and impure representations, the moment I command him, in the name of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, to leave me, he instantly departs.”

You have heard, no doubt, how some saints burned so ardently with the fire of divine love that they often trembled with eager desire : even the objects which they touched bore the impress of this fire of divine love. We read of such occurrences in the lives of St. Philip Neri, St. Catharine of Genoa, and St. Wenceslaus, king of Bohemia. The latter loved Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament so fervently that, with his own hands, he gathered the wheat and the grapes and made the hosts and the wine which were to be used at Mass. He often went at night, even in winter, to visit the church in which the Blessed Sacrament was kept. At such times the flames of divine love were burning so ardently in his soul, that they communicated to his body a sensible warmth and melted the snow under his feet. On one occasion, he turned this gift to a good account. His servant, who accompanied him by night, suffered much from the severity of the cold, whereupon the holy man ordered him to follow closely and tread in his footsteps. The servant did so, and no longer felt the coldness of the snow.

Now, where did the saints obtain this inestimable gift of divine love ? Was it, perhaps, in conversation with men ? Oh, no ; it was from conversing frequently with Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. The oftener and the longer they conversed with him, the more they felt their hearts inflamed with divine love. How have so many souls been enlightened to see and to know the vanity of the world ? Where did they find strength and courage

to leave all the comforts of home, and to lead a holy, mortified, poor and despised life? Whence did they derive this great grace? They derived it from their frequent conversations with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. Listen to what St. Alphonsus, that great lover of the Blessed Sacrament, says: "Nowhere have holy souls made more admirable resolutions than at the feet of their hidden God. Out of gratitude to my Jesus, veiled in this great sacrament, I must declare, that it was through this devotion, visiting him in his tabernacles, that I withdrew from the world, where, to my misfortune, I had lived to the age of twenty-six. Happy will you be, if you can separate yourself from it earlier than I did, and give yourself wholly to that Lord who has given himself wholly to you. I repeat it—you will be happy, not only in eternity, but even in this life. Believe me, all else is folly—banquets, plays, parties, amusements—these are enjoyments full of bitterness and remorse; trust one who has tried them, and who weeps that he did so. I assure you that the soul, by remaining, with any degree of recollection, before the Blessed Sacrament, receives more comfort from Jesus than the world with all its pleasures and pastimes can ever afford. What delight to be before the altar with faith, and with even a little tender love, and to speak familiarly to Jesus, who is there to hear and grant the prayers of those who visit him! What a happiness to implore pardon for our sins; to lay our wants before Jesus, as one friend does before another in whom he places entire confidence; to beg for his grace, his love, his paradise! Above all, what a heaven, to make acts of love to this Lord who remains on the altar, praying to his eternal Father for us, and burning with love towards us! In a word, you



will find that the time you spend devoutly before this divine sacrament, will be the most useful of your life, and that which will most console you in death, and for eternity. You will, perhaps, gain more in a quarter of an hour's prayer before the Blessed Sacrament, than in all the other spiritual exercises of the day. God does, indeed, grant, in every place, the petitions of those who pray to him; he has promised to do so: 'Ask, and it shall be given you.' (Matt. vii., 7.) But in the most holy sacrament, Jesus dispenses favors more abundantly to those who visit him. But of what use are mere words? 'Taste and see.'"

To this little exhortation I can add nothing. I will but repeat once more the words of Holy Writ: "Taste and see." Go often with devotion to visit Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, and after a while you will experience the truth of what St. Alphonsus says; nay, perhaps, it may even be given to you to feel transports of joy and gladness such as the saints have experienced in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, and to exclaim, in the fulness of consolation, with the blessed Gerard (a lay-brother of the Congregation of the most Holy Redeemer): "Lord, let me go, let me go"—or with St. Francis Xavier: "It is enough, Lord, it is enough"—or with St. Aloysius Gonzaga: "Withdraw from me, O Lord, withdraw from me!"

But, most assuredly, there is one hour when the remembrance of the visits you have paid to the Blessed Sacrament will give you indescribable pleasure: it is the hour of death. If ever you will feel remorse for neglecting this great duty, it will be when your soul has left the body. Ah! then you shall understand how near you were to Jesus Christ while on earth. O with what shame and confusion

will you be covered when Jesus will say to you : "I was a stranger and you received me not. I was so near to you, and you visited me not. You have treated me as an out-cast ; you did not converse with me, nor ask graces of me ; you have left me alone ; you have thought of me seldom, or never. What will be your confusion at such a well-merited reproach ! Spare yourself this shame and confusion ; resolve, henceforth, to spend some time in church every day, say a half-hour or a quarter of an hour at least, in the presence of Jesus Christ in the most holy sacrament. Then will our Lord say to you at the hour of death : "I was, indeed, a stranger to many lukewarm Christians, but not to you ; you came to visit me ; you kept company with me on earth ; you shall, henceforth, enjoy my presence in heaven forever and ever."

Let us, therefore, often visit our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament of his love, and address him in words like the following :

Hail, dearest Jesus !  
Joy of my weary heart,  
Dearer to me thou art  
Than mine own life !  
May this cold heart of mine  
Burn e'er with love divine,  
Till it be meek and pure,  
Pure like to thine.

Ah, may the life-blood  
From thy fond bleeding Heart  
Cleanse my weak, sinful heart,  
From every stain !  
Heal my soul, sad and sore,  
Nourish it more and more,  
Till it be strong and free,  
Free as of yore !

Hail, loving Captive!  
 Throughout the livelong day,  
 While night doth wear away,  
 Thou lovest me.  
 May I, too, love but thee;  
 May my soul turn to thee,  
 As points the loadstone e'er  
 To its bright star!

See the meek flowers—  
 Round thee they sweetly sigh,  
 Gladly they droop and die  
 At thy blest door.  
 May I, too, yearn and sigh;  
 May I, too, live and die;  
 Loving, live; hoping, die,  
 Only for thee!

Fondly the birdling  
 Flies to the honey-flower,  
 Drinking in, hour by hour,  
 New life and joy.  
 May my soul fly to thee—  
 May my soul eagerly  
 Drink from thy bleeding Heart  
 Life, Love and Joy.

2. *Jesus Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament to continue to offer himself for us in the holy sacrifice of the Mass.*

Our dear Lord instituted the Holy Eucharist not only that he might abide with us in our churches, be visited and receive our homage of supreme adoration, but also that he might be the great Sacrifice for the living and the dead, even to the end of the world. The Holy Eucharist as a sacrifice is commonly called the Mass. [As I have published a special work on this sublime subject of our holy religion, (*Holy Mass, the Sacrifice for the Living and the Dead*,) the devout reader is referred to this work for a full explanation of the questions on Mass in the Catechism, from page 160 to 164.]

3. *Jesus Christ instituted the Blessed Sacrament, that he might give himself to us in Holy Communion as the food of our souls.*

The Holy Eucharist as the spiritual food of our souls is commonly called Holy Communion.

### **1. What is Holy Communion ?**

*Holy Communion is the receiving of Jesus Christ under the appearance of bread and wine.*

The Holy Eucharist is indeed Jesus Christ himself. To receive it, therefore, is to receive our dear Saviour, and to be united to him in the most intimate manner; it is to receive the same Jesus who, at his birth, was laid in a manger and adored by the Magi; the same who changed water into wine; who restored sight to the blind; who made the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak. We esteem Simeon happy in having been permitted to take the Infant Jesus in his arms; and, were we to receive a like grace, we would no doubt exclaim with him: "Now dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to thy word, in peace: because mine eyes have seen thy salvation."

We consider Zaccheus happy, because our Lord vouchsafed to enter his house and eat with him; we deem St. John happy, because he rested on the breast of our Saviour at the Last Supper; and, above all, we consider the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph so unutterably happy, because they protected and nourished our dear Lord. But are we not as happy as they? Are we not even happier? We do not hold our Lord in our arms as Simeon did, but we receive him into our heart in holy communion; we do not rest on the bosom of our Lord like St. John, but the Saviour himself rests in our heart after holy communion;



we do not nurse and protect our Lord like the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, but we have a still greater happiness, for the Saviour himself nourishes us and gives himself to us as our food. O Love! O Love! O who can understand the love of God for men!

What would you say, if a shepherd suffered himself to be slain in order to save his sheep? What would you say, if a king loved a beggar so much, as to give himself to him as food in order to save the poor wretch from starvation? Do you think that any shepherd or king would act thus? Certainly not. Again: a mother's love is proverbial; and mothers have been found who loved their offspring so much that they deprived themselves even of their scanty meal to give it to their hungry children; and yet it has sometimes happened that even mothers have devoured their own infants in time of famine.

Now, while no shepherd loves his sheep so much as to give his own life for them; while no king ever loved a beggar so much as to suffer, for his sake, the loss of life or limb; while even a mother can grow cruel towards the fruit of her womb; Jesus, our God and our King, has loved us so much as to give himself to us whole and entire—his flesh and blood, his humanity and divinity, really and substantially.

*In Holy Communion we receive the body of Jesus Christ.*

During our dear Lord's life on earth, his sacred body had a peculiar healing, life-giving power. A virtue went forth from his body that healed those that came near him. He expelled demons from the possessed. He touched the blind, and they saw. He touched the deaf, and they heard. He touched the dumb, and they spoke. He touched the sick, and they were healed. He touched the dead, and

they were restored to life. Even before his resurrection, before his body was glorified, Jesus made his body invisible, as we see in various parts of the Gospel. (Luke iv., 30.)

The Nazarenes once tried to cast him down a hill. (John viii., 59.) The Jews wished to stone him, (John x., 39,) but in vain. He disappeared from their sight. He walked upon the sea, and the crystal waves kissed with reverence the sacred feet of their Creator. On Mount Thabor Jesus showed his body to his disciples, as it would have always appeared had he not chosen to hide his glory ; and then his face shone as the sun, and his garments were whiter than snow. After his resurrection, his body became glorified and assumed the qualities of a spirit. He could pass through a wall without breaking it, as a sunbeam passes through glass. He passed through the tomb, though it was sealed. He entered the supper-room, though the windows and doors were bolted and barred. He became visible and invisible, at will. He appeared under different forms. To St. Magdalen, he appeared as a gardener; to the disciples going to Emmaus, he appeared as a stranger and traveller. Now, it is this wonderful body, this glorified body, this life-giving, divine body, this body possessing the qualities of a spirit that we receive in holy communion. Oh ! the tremendous moment when the body of the living God is laid upon our tongue ! Should a thunderbolt strike us it would kill us instantly ; and here he who wields the thunderbolt comes, not to kill us, but to fill us with blessings.

*In Holy Communion we receive the precious blood of Jesus.*

Mortal sin is so great an evil that, were all the men on earth and all the angels of heaven to perform the most

rigorous penances, were they to make every sacrifice for the love of God, yet *all* their good works would never be able to atone for one single mortal sin. Nay, the fierce fires of hell, though burning throughout all eternity, can never destroy a single mortal sin. Now, the blood of Jesus Christ has such wonderful power that one single drop which we receive in holy communion can wash away, in the twinkling of an eye, all the sins that ever have been or ever will be committed on the face of the earth. One single drop of this precious blood has more virtue than all the angels and saints together. Now, it is not a single drop of this precious blood that we receive in holy communion: no! we receive every drop of it. We receive every drop of that divine blood which trickled down to the ground in the *Garden of Olives*, to comfort us in the hour of sorrow, to give us strength in our struggles against temptation, and especially at the hour of death. We receive every drop that fell, like a shower, from the sacred body of our Lord when he was scourged at the pillar, to give us grace to bear with patience the chastisements which God, in his mercy, sends upon us. We receive every drop of that precious blood which bathed the face of our Lord when his sacred head was pierced with thorns, to purify our thoughts and imaginations. We receive, in fine, every drop that flowed from the heart of Jesus Christ when it was pierced and broken on the cross, to purify our heart from every sinful inclination.

*In Holy Communion we receive also the blessed soul of our Lord.* In that blessed soul are hidden all the treasures of knowledge and understanding. (Coloss. ii.) When our Lord died on the cross, his soul left his sacred body and went down into Limbo. Limbo was a prison in which

were detained the souls of the just who had died before Christ. Some of them had been there for thousands of years. They knew that the Son of God would come one day to open their prison and take them to heaven. At last, the long-expected moment came. A light brighter than a thousand suns flashed upon their eyes. The soul of Jesus Christ stood among them, and its presence changed their prison into a paradise. Now, it is this very same soul of Jesus that we receive in holy communion.

But in holy communion we receive something still better than even the soul of Jesus Christ. In holy communion we receive also his *divine nature*, that is, we receive *God himself*.

See that child who has just received holy communion. She is very young, and yet the eternity of God is in her breast. She is poor, little and weak, and yet within her soul dwells the almighty power of God. She may have committed faults, and yet within her dwells the God of all sanctity. The prophet Isaiah once beheld a vision of God in his glory. "And behold," he says, "I saw the Lord seated on a throne great and elevated: the glory of God filled the temple. Around him stood the seraphim, who veiled their faces with folded wings before the dazzling blaze of God's glory. And the angels, filled with awe and wonder, cried aloud: Holy, thrice holy, the Lord God of armies; the whole earth is full of his glory." (Is. 6.) The prophet Daniel, too, beheld the eternal unbeginning God seated on his throne of majesty. His garments were whiter than snow, and his throne was as a flame of fire. A swift stream of fire issued from the throne. Thousands of angels ministered unto him; and ten thousand times a hundred thousand surrounded him and awaited his bidding



in trembling awe. (Dan. vii., 9.) Now, it is the very same unbeginning God that we receive in holy communion. From the loving heart of God there issues forth a swift stream of fire, the fire of his immense, eternal love ; and that fire of God's love streams through our souls, and fills our hearts.

Many years ago, God descended from heaven upon Mount Sinai, and gave his commandments to his chosen people. And God said to Moses : " On the third day, I will come down in the sight of all the people. Let the people be ready ; let them wash their garments and be holy. Thou shalt draw a line round the mountain ; and if any one, whether man or beast, shall pass that line, or touch the mount, he shall be stoned to death or shot with arrows." And now, the third day came ; the morning dawned, and, behold, a dark mass of heavy, black clouds surrounded the whole mountain ; and now the vivid lightnings began to flash through the dark clouds, and the dazzling glare of the lightnings and the deafening roar of the thunder struck terror into the stoutest heart. Amid the rattling din and crash of the thunder, the wild noise of the trumpets could be heard ; and the thrilling, unearthly tones of the trumpets grew louder and louder, and were prolonged to a great length. So terrible was the sound, so full of majesty was the voice of God, that even Moses himself was terrified and said : " I fear and I tremble." (Enod. xix., 13.)

Now, the very same God who descended on Mount Sinai, rests upon our tongue and enters our heart in holy communion. He comes to us, not amid thunder and lightning, but sweetly and gently as a sunbeam falls upon a little flower : full of meekness and compassion, disguised under the simple appearance of bread, in order to take away all

fear from us and fill us with confidence and love. When God enters our heart in holy communion, we do not say, as Moses did: I fear and tremble; but we say: "My God, I love thee: my Jesus, how kind and loving thou art!"

"I am the good Shepherd," says Jesus; "a good shepherd gives his life for his sheep." He seems to say to us: "I give my life for you, every day, at every holy Mass, at each holy communion. I am the God of supreme wisdom, yet I cannot find a more adequate pledge of my love than I give you in holy communion. I am almighty, but my omnipotence is not able to do anything greater; I am love itself, but I cannot give you anything more consoling!" It is so, sweet Lord, I acknowledge thy infinite love, and, full of amazement at thy immense charity, I find no better words to express my astonishment than those of one of thy saints, St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzis: "Lord, thou hast become foolish from love of us." "God has given us heaven," says St. Augustine; "he has given us this earth, he has given us his kingdom, he has given us himself—what more has he to give? O my God, how prodigal art thou of thyself!"

## 2. Who may receive Holy Communion?

*Only baptized persons who, 1, know what Communion is; 2, are in the grace of God; and, 3, fasting from midnight.*

Common sense tells us that it is not becoming to receive our Lord into our heart, without previous preparation. You have sometimes, no doubt, witnessed the public reception of some distinguished person whom the people wish to honor—some great warrior, or successful candidate, or eloquent orator. What a crowd in the street! What anxiety to secure a convenient place! What a cry and tumult on all sides! And, when the hero of the day arrives, what

eagerness to look at him ! How happy they on whom he smiles, or to whom he speaks ! How happy is the favored citizen with whom he takes up his abode ! What hurry and bustle and excitement in the house where he is to lodge ! Now, stop and ask yourself, for whom is all this ? For a man—a poor, weak, mortal man. And I, alas ! with what unconcern, do I receive him who is the “splendor of his Father’s glory and the figure of his substance !”

When King David was asked why he had prepared so vast a quantity of gold, silver, and precious stones for the temple he was about to erect, he answered : “The work is great ; for the house is not prepared for the man, but for God.” And yet, in that temple the holy of holies, the ark of the covenant and the manna were but shadows. We have the true Holy of holies, the living manna, the life-giving bread that came down from heaven ! Should we not, then, make every effort to arrange a fit dwelling-place for this divine Guest ? “When thou shalt sit to eat with a prince,” says the wise King Solomon, “consider diligently what is set before thy face.” How much more diligently ought we to consider what we are about to do, when we appear at the table of the great King of heaven and earth, to feed on the flesh of his beloved Son !

This reflection, so natural and obvious, is sufficient to show us the *propriety* of some actual preparation for communion. To this I will add another reflection, to show the great *utility* of such preparation. It is in the highest degree advantageous to prepare ourselves properly for holy communion, because the fruit which this divine food produces depends on the dispositions with which we receive it. Wood, that is not well seasoned, will not burn well, because the moisture in it resists the action of the fire ; in

like manner, the heart which is full of earthly affections, will not be inflamed by this holy sacrament with the living fire of divine love.

Father Lallemant says, that many souls are almost as little benefited by the Holy Eucharist as the walls of the church in which it is preserved, because they are as hard and as cold as these very walls. St. Bernard expresses the same truth, in these words : “ *Sicut tu Deo apparueris, ita tibi Deus apparebit.* ” “ God will exhibit himself to you just as you show yourself disposed towards him.” When, therefore, people complain of receiving but little fruit from their communions, they only betray their own negligence.

As the light of the sun far exceeds the light of the moon, so do the effects of the Holy Eucharist in a loving heart greatly surpass those which it produces in a tepid, slothful soul.

One day, the blessed Margaret Mary Alacoque saw our Lord in the host as the priest was giving communion, and she noticed that when the priest came to some of the communicants, our Lord stretched out his arms, and seemed eager to unite himself to them, while there were others towards whom he showed the greatest repugnance, and only suffered himself to be dragged into their mouths by certain cords and bands with which he was bound. He explained to her afterwards, that the souls which he entered willingly were those who were careful to please him ; and those to whom he showed so much aversion, were tepid Christians, who received him into hearts full of faults and imperfections. He told her, moreover, that he entered into such hearts merely on account of his promises, and the law which he had laid upon himself in the institution of the Blessed Sacrament, and that this was the meaning of the bands and cords which she had seen.



Wholesome medicine, if seasonably applied, produces most beneficial effects; but, if unseasonably taken, proves very pernicious and destructive. In like manner, the great gifts of God, if received into a soul properly prepared, produce most wonderful effects; whilst to those who receive them without the proper dispositions, they bring with them eternal death. The ark of the Lord was to the Jewish people the source of numberless blessings, whilst, when borne off by the Philistines, it brought on them a most destructive plague and the heaviest calamities. (1 Kings v.) Food nourishes and supports the body if it is received into a healthy stomach; but the same food when received into a stomach full of bad secretions produces malignant diseases. Thus he who is properly prepared and disposed for holy communion, receives in it the most precious gifts of divine grace; whilst he who approaches without proper preparation and disposition, not only derives from it no advantage, but plunges his soul into unutterable misery.

How, then, you ask, am I to prepare for holy communion? Before all things you must know how to distinguish this sacred table from profane tables, (1 Cor. x., 21.,) this heavenly bread from common bread. (Catech. of the Council of Trent.) To be able to make this distinction you must be well instructed in the doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, and believe most firmly all that the Church teaches concerning this sublime mystery. To discern, then, the body of the Lord is to believe firmly that the Holy Eucharist is really and truly the body and blood of the Lord: the body and blood of him whom the angels adore in heaven, at whose nod the pillars of heaven tremble, of whose glory the heavens and earth are full.

On this great lively faith in the real presence depend

the unspeakable blessings of holy communion. On this account, in the early ages of the Church, the faithful were obliged to make acts of faith, before receiving communion. They made these acts of faith three times after the consecration of the bread, and three times after the consecration of the wine, by saying aloud, *Amen*: that is, "Yes, we believe firmly that Jesus Christ is really present on the altar." Then, immediately before communion, the deacon cried out with a loud voice, "The body of Christ!" The faithful again answered the seventh time, *Amen*—"yes, we sincerely believe." He who is animated with this lively faith will carefully prepare himself to receive his Saviour. He will ask himself the following questions: Who comes in holy communion? To whom does he come? Why does he come? With what desire does he come?

*Who comes* in this holy sacrament? It is my Creator, who has given me everything I possess; in whom I live, and move, and am. It is God: all powerful, all wise, all holy, all beautiful! Jesus Christ comes: the eternal Son of the Father, who, moved by love unspeakable, came down from heaven into the pure womb of the Virgin, was born into this world, and lived as man among sinners. The good Shepherd comes to seek his lost sheep; my Redeemer comes, who died on the cross for sinners. Ah! he who believes this firmly, will, according to the advice of St. Paul, *prove himself* before he receives the body of the Lord: that is, he will carefully examine his conscience, lest perhaps he be guilty of mortal sin. Before receiving our Lord we must carefully examine our conscience, and cleanse our soul from its defilement by true contrition and confession. The Council of Trent declares that he who is conscious of mortal sin and has an oppor-

tunity of going to confession, however sorry he may deem himself, is bound to abstain from receiving holy communion until he has made a good confession. (Sess. xiii., Can. xi.) It may happen, however, that a person, when about to receive communion, remembers a mortal sin which he forgot to confess. In this case, he should make an act of contrition, resolve to mention that sin in his next confession, and then receive holy communion without scruple; for, as theologians say, that sin has been forgiven, though indirectly, by the confession already made. The Council of Trent says expressly that no one *conscious* of mortal sin, however contrite he may think himself, shall approach without being purified by previous sacramental confession. He is, of course, still bound to confess the sin, but not bound until his next confession.

One day, the Emperor Frederic visited a certain nobleman and was received into an apartment which was thickly hung with cobwebs. The emperor was transported with rage, and immediately left the house, exclaiming: "This room is better fitted for a dog than for an emperor!" How much more reason has Jesus Christ to feel indignant at those who receive him into a soul defiled with mortal sin? "He whose eyes are pure and cannot behold iniquity!"

There are certain snakes, says St. Bernard, which spit out the poison that is in their mouths before they begin to drink; and we, before approaching the fountain of life, must spit out the poison of sin. Those, therefore, who have been sufficiently instructed in the Christian doctrine and believe all that the Church teaches, but have not as yet been baptized, must spit out the poison of original sin, as well as of other actual sins, by receiving baptism; but those who, after baptism, render themselves guilty of

mortal sin, must spit out this poisonous guilt by a sincere confession.

The Holy Eucharist is a sacrament of the living, and can therefore be received worthily only by those who are spiritually alive : that is, by those who are in the state of sanctifying grace, which is the life of the soul. This life of grace is lost by mortal sin. Hence, it would be a sacrilege to receive the Lord of heaven and earth while in the state of mortal sin. Instead of deriving any benefit from holy communion, the unworthy receiver only makes himself more guilty in the sight of the Lord.

I have said we must be free from mortal sin, for mortal sin alone renders us absolutely incapable of receiving any fruits from communion ; but venial sins, especially those which are fully deliberate, and even voluntary imperfections, greatly hinder the efficacy of this sacrament. He who now and then speaks in disparagement of his neighbor, or tells petty falsehoods, though he may not commit a mortal sin, yet deprives himself of many graces which he would otherwise receive.

Moreover, in order to receive all the graces attached to this sacrament, our hearts must be free from all inordinate affections. St. Gertrude, on one occasion, asked our Lord how she ought to prepare for holy communion, and he replied : " I ask nothing more than that you should come with an empty heart."

*To whom does Jesus come ?* To a miserable sinner who has so often broken the commandments ; to a steward who has wasted his Master's goods ; to a servant who has disobeyed his Lord ; to a subject who has rebelled against his Prince ; to a redeemed captive who has been unthankful to his Deliverer ; to a soldier who has deserted his Commander :



to a prodigal who has turned his back upon his Father; to a spouse who has been unfaithful to her Bridegroom. Oh! what a mingling of sentiments, exalting and depressing, must arise in the heart when about to approach holy communion! How great the distance between the receiver and him who is received! Who can think of this and not feel himself completely unworthy of such a grace!

The Church clearly indicates these sentiments of unworthiness, in the following words:

*“Domine, non sum dignus, ut intres sub tectum meum, sed tantum dic verbo, et sanabitur anima mea.—*Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.” These words were spoken by the centurion, who came to our Saviour asking him to heal his servant. Our Lord at once offered to go to his house to perform the cure, but the good centurion replied: “Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst enter under my roof, but only say the word and my servant shall be healed.” This answer pleased our Lord so much that he not only instantly healed the servant, but greatly commended the centurion’s faith. These words express a great esteem for Jesus Christ, a great sense of unworthiness on the part of the supplicant, and a great confidence that he would obtain what he asked.

These are precisely the dispositions which the Church requires for the proper reception of holy communion. Hence she repeats the words of the centurion in a loud voice, each time she distributes the bread of life, in order to remind the communicants of the duty of approaching the sacred banquet with a deep sense of their utter nothingness, and with a great desire of being united to their divine Saviour.

Eusebius relates that when the holy viaticum was brought to St. Jerome, he exclaimed : "Lord, why dost thou lower thyself so much as to come to a publican and a sinner, not only to eat with him, but even to be eaten by him !" And then, casting himself upon the earth, he received his Saviour with many tears. Now if a saint, who had spent a long life in penitential works for the love of Christ, felt so penetrated with a sense of his unworthiness, how much more should we humble ourselves when we draw nigh to God ! Should we not, with a true sorrow for our past unfaithfulness, accuse ourselves before him, and resolve, by the help of his grace, to amend our lives ? The publican, of whom we read in the Gospel, stood near the door of the temple, and smote his breast, saying : "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner !" And should not we, when going to the altar, hesitate and smite our breast, saying, in the depths of our heart :

O Lord, I am not worthy,  
O Lord, I am not worthy,  
Thy sacred feast to share ;  
Do thou but make me worthy,  
Sweet Jesu, make me worthy,  
O hear my ardent prayer !  
O loving Saviour, hasten,  
Pure Bridegroom of my heart,  
My soul yearns to receive thee,  
My heart longs to receive thee,  
And from thee ne'er to part !

Thy holiness unearthly,  
Thy glory's dazzling splendor,  
Fills my weak soul with fear ;  
If angels trembling serve thee,  
If angels veil their faces,  
How shall I dare draw near ?  
O Lord, I am not worthy  
Thy sacred feast to share.

Do thou but make me worthy,  
Sweet Jesu, make me worthy,  
O hear my ardent prayer !

Thou lovingly invitest,  
Dear Lord, all those that labor,  
Dost offer them sweet rest :  
Thou heal'st the broken-hearted,  
Dost pardon the repentant,  
And fold them to thy breast.  
Sweet Lord, to thee I hasten,  
My Hope, my Life, thou art ;  
Thy wounded hands stretch toward me ;  
Thy wounded heart is open—  
O fill my aching heart !

The soul, having looked into the depths of her own unworthiness, must now lift up her eyes to heaven and ask : “ *Why does this holy God come to visit a sinner like me ?* ” And here she finds an immensity of goodness which fills her with courage and joy. Why does he come ? Surely not for himself, for he has no need of us. We cannot make him richer or happier ; we cannot give him anything that he has not first given us. He sees in us nothing of our own but misery and sin. He is perfectly happy. The angels serve him day and night. There is not one of them but would willingly be annihilated if God were to will it. What, then, is it that induces our Lord to come to us ? It is love, pure undeserved love. He comes to apply to our souls the fruits of the redemption which he accomplished on Calvary. In this sacrament he becomes a Saviour to each one of us. He comes to accomplish the work for which he created us, to prepare us for the place in heaven which he has destined for us. It is he that works in this sacrament. He created us ; he redeemed us ; now he comes to pour out upon us all the riches of his love ; he comes to give us light to know, and strength to do his will ; he

comes to repair what is decayed, and to restore what is wasted; to forgive rebellion and unthankfulness,—in a word, to receive us as children; to clothe us anew with the nuptial robe; to put a ring on our finger, and shoes on our feet; to eat and make merry with us.

What, then, should be our sentiments, when we approach our Lord in this mystery, but those of the returning prodigal: “I will arise and will go to my Father?” And when, at this wonderful banquet, our good Father, Jesus Christ, falls upon our neck and gives us the kiss of peace; when he feeds us, not with the fatted calf, but with his own most precious flesh, what have we to do but to yield to his loving embrace, and to say, with humble gratitude: “O Lord, I am not worthy! I am not worthy to be called thy son!”

It is certain that habitual fidelity, even in the smallest matters, is necessary if we wish to receive special graces in this sacrament; but, at the moment of communion, what is chiefly necessary, is a great *confidence* arising from a deep conviction of our own nothingness, and from a sense of God’s exceedingly great goodness. He comes to us with his hands full of graces; we should meet him with an affectionate *desire* to be united to him, and a *hunger* and *thirst* for his justice. But, perhaps, you will say: “I know that all this is true; I am sure that a great desire to receive Jesus Christ is the best disposition for approaching him, but this is precisely my difficulty. I have not this desire; I am cold and dry; my heart is dull and sluggish. I go to communion, not, indeed, without the wish to please our Lord, but with little fervor or affection for him.” Our Lord himself has answered this objection. He said one day to St. Mechtildis: “When thou art about to receive my body and blood, desire, for the



greater glory of my name, to have all the ardor of love which the most fervent heart ever had for me, and then thou mayst receive me with confidence, for I will attribute to thee, as if thou really hadst it, all that fervor that thou desirest to have." What can be more consoling than this? You have no devotion, but you wish to have it. You do not feel all the respect and confidence you would like to have, but your wish to have more will supply what is wanting; you have no humility, but you can humble yourself for being so proud; you have no love, but you can offer your desire to love God with all your heart. From the poor, even trifling presents are accepted. Offer what you have, and if you have nothing, then do what the saints recommend—say, "Lord, when a great king comes to lodge in the cabin of a poor man, he does not expect the poor man to make a suitable preparation, but he sends his own servants to make every thing ready for him; do thou the same, O Lord, now that thou art coming to dwell in my poor heart!" This alone will be an excellent disposition for receiving, and one very pleasing to Jesus Christ.

One day, St. Gertrude went to receive holy communion without being sufficiently prepared. Being greatly afflicted at this, she begged the Blessed Virgin Mary, and all the saints, to offer up to God, in her behalf, all their merits, that they might in some way supply her own deficiency, whereupon our Saviour appeared to her and said: "Now, before the whole heavenly court, thou appearest adorned for communion as thou wouldst wish to be."

*With what desire does Jesus come?* It is utterly impossible to give an adequate description of our dear Saviour's longing to unite himself to our souls in holy communion. I will, therefore, merely point out some of the ways in

which he has manifested this desire. The first proof of our Lord's great longing to enter into our hearts in holy communion, is his own declaration. When he was about to institute the Holy Eucharist, he said to his disciples: "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you," thereby expressing, according to St. Lawrence Justinian, his most ardent wish, his most earnest desire, to unite himself to us in holy communion. And what he expressed in so touching a manner at the Last Supper, he has often declared in other ways.

One day, as St. Gertrude was meditating on the greatness of the love which made the Lord and King of heaven find his delight in the society of the children of men, our Saviour illustrated what seemed to her so incomprehensible by the following comparison: The son of a king is surely much higher and greater than the children who run about on the streets; he has in his father's palace everything that can delight and gratify him; yet, if you give him the choice either to go out and play with the children in the street, or to stay at home amid the splendors of his father's court, he will certainly prefer the former. "Thus I, too," said our Lord, "find my pleasure in being with you; and having instituted the Blessed Sacrament for this end, any one who prevents a soul from receiving me, deprives me of a great pleasure." He also said to St. Mechtildis: "Look at the bees, and see with what eagerness they seek the honey-flowers; yet know that my desire to come to you in holy communion is far greater." Nay, he declared to St. Margaret of Cortona, that he would even reward her confessor, and that richly too, for having advised her to receive holy communion frequently; and Father Antonio Torres, as we read in his life, appeared, shortly after death,

in great splendor, to a certain person, and revealed to him that God had increased his glory in heaven in a special manner for having allowed frequent communion to his penitents. Most remarkable is that promise of Jesus Christ by which he induced the blessed Prudentiana Zagnoni (a nun of the order of St. Clare) to receive the Blessed Sacrament frequently. "If thou wilt receive me often in holy communion," said he, "I will forget all thy ingratitude towards me."

Words and promises of our Lord like these are indeed powerful arguments to convince us of his excessive desire to enter our hearts in holy communion; but the extraordinary miracles which he has performed, in order to enable his servants to receive him frequently in holy communion, are, if possible, still more powerful arguments. St. Theresa, at one period of her life, was afflicted with a severe illness, attended with vomiting, which occurred regularly every morning and evening. What most distressed her was, that this illness prevented her from receiving holy communion. In this affliction she had recourse to our Lord, and he, whose desire to come into her heart was far greater than hers to receive him, was pleased to cure her. But, as if to show for what purpose the relief was granted, he delivered her only from the attack to which she was subject in the morning, leaving her subject to that which usually came on in the evening. A similar difficulty prevented St. Juliana Falconieri from receiving our Lord when her last hour had come. After having thought of every possible means of satisfying her desire for communion, she at last entreated her confessor to bring the sacred host near her, that she might at least humbly kiss it. This being refused her, she begged that it might be laid upon her breast, in order that her heart might feel some

refreshment from being near to Jesus ; and when the priest, in compliance with her request, spread the corporal on her breast and laid our Lord upon it, she exclaimed, with the greatest delight: " O my sweet Jesus ! " As she drew her last breath, the sacred host disappeared. After her death the form of the host was found distinctly impressed upon her side, near her heart. Our Saviour in the Blessed Sacrament united himself to her heart, to strengthen her in her death-struggle and accompany her soul to heaven.

In the eighth chapter of the life of St. Lawrence Justinian, it is related that there lived in Venice a nun who was prevented from receiving Jesus Christ on the feast of Corpus Christi. Being much grieved thereat, she besought St. Lawrence at least to remember her at Mass. Our Lord could not allow her piety to go unrewarded. Accordingly, while the holy patriarch was saying Mass in the crowded church, the nun saw him enter her cell with the Blessed Sacrament to give her holy communion.

At other times our Lord made the miracle still more remarkable, by employing the ministry of an angel or a saint, instead of a priest, or by dispensing altogether with a visible agent. The blessed Gerard Majella, lay-brother of the Congregation of the most Holy Redeemer, when he was but nine years old, approached one day the communion rail, whilst the priest was distributing holy communion, impelled by a strong desire to receive his Saviour ; but the priest, seeing that he was too young asked him if he had made his First Communion, and finding that he had not, sent him away. But the good heart of Jesus could not suffer the child to hunger after him in vain ; that very night our Lord's body was brought to Gerard by the Archangel St. Michael. St. Stanislaus Kostka was sick, in the house of a Protestant



and, debarred of every opportunity of receiving his beloved Lord, he made his appeal to the Queen of Heaven, and obtained, through her intercession, the grace to receive the Blessed Sacrament at the hands of St. Barbara.

One day, whilst St. Bonaventure was assisting at Mass, he felt an ardent desire to receive holy communion, but abstained, through fear of not being sufficiently prepared. Our Lord, however, could not refrain from gratifying his desire; when the priest had broken the host, the saint perceived that a small particle of it had come and rested on his tongue. I might multiply instances of such miraculous communions, but those which I have adduced are sufficient to show how much our Lord has done in order to satisfy his wish to enter into our hearts in holy communion. I will, therefore, proceed to point out another way by which he has manifested this desire, namely, the threats and the promises he has made in order to induce us to receive the Blessed Sacrament.

When a law-giver wishes to insure the observance of a law, he promises rewards to those who keep the law, and threatens with punishment those who violate it; and the rewards and punishments are in proportion to the importance which he attaches to the law. Now consider what our Lord has done to urge us to receive him frequently in the Blessed Sacrament. Not content with giving us the bare precept, "Take and eat, for this is my body," he has added thereto the strongest inducements. What more could he do to prevail upon us to receive him, than to promise us heaven if we do so. "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood," says he, "shall have life everlasting." On the other hand, he threatens us with hell-fire if we refuse. "Amen, amen, I say unto you, unless you

eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you, that is, you shall be condemned to eternal torments."

Moreover, as he threatens with eternal torments those who never receive him, or who neglect to receive him when the Church commands them, so he also punishes, in the fires of Purgatory, those who, from negligence and indifference, refuse to receive holy communion as often as their state of life demands.

While St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi was praying one day before the Blessed Sacrament, she saw one of her deceased sisters in the choir completely enveloped in a robe of fire, and reverently adoring the Blessed Sacrament. The saint was given to understand that the deceased nun was in purgatory, and that she was condemned to wear this mantle of fire, and to adore the Blessed Sacrament for an hour every day, because, in her lifetime, she had often through negligence omitted to receive holy communion.

Now what do all these invitations, these promises, these rewards and punishments prove? What, but the unutterable desire of Jesus Christ to unite himself to us in holy communion. He seems, in a manner, to force us to receive him. He makes our temporal and eternal welfare depend on our receiving him, and thus makes use of our natural desire for happiness to bring us to his altar. He seems to say, "If you do not receive me, you shall have no health, or strength; no comfort, no peace, no rest; no courage, no zeal, no devotion; you will be vehemently assailed by temptations which you will be unable to resist; you will commit mortal sin, you will lose my grace and friendship, you will become a slave of the devil, and, finally, you will fall into hell and be tormented forever."

I do not think that I can add any more striking proof of our Saviour's desire to enter our hearts in holy communion; but there yet remains one to be considered which is certainly more affecting. I allude to the patience with which he has borne the insults that, for eighteen hundred years, have been heaped upon him in the Holy Eucharist. I will not offend you, dear reader, with the relation of the insults which have been offered to our dear Lord in the sacrament of his love; it is too dark a page in the history of human depravity. Suffice it to say, that he has been loaded with almost every species of outrage which malice could suggest, or impiety perpetrate. Infidels, Jews, heretics, and sometimes even nominal Catholics, have united together to insult our dear Lord. All the sorrows that Jesus had to endure during his life on earth are repeated again and again in this holy mystery.

Now, why does Jesus Christ endure such affronts? Surely we would not be willing to remain with those who continually maltreat and persecute us; life in the desert, in the midst of extreme poverty, would be preferable to such a lot. Why, then, is our Saviour so patient amid so many outrages? Is he not free to act as he pleases?

Is he, perhaps, constrained to remain with us in the Blessed Sacrament? Thank God, he is. He does, indeed, sometimes vindicate his honor; he does sometimes visit irreverence with exemplary punishment; but there is one point to which his anger never goes—he will never take back the gift of his love. Men may do what they will, but the desire of Jesus Christ to be united with us will always force him to remain in the Blessed Sacrament. This is the secret of our Lord's endurance. He endures all things for the sake of the elect.

All the outrages that the wicked have heaped upon him are compensated by one devout communion, and he is willing to remain in our churches, abandoned, alone, for hours and hours, that he may be able to unite himself with the first soul that comes hungering for the bread of life.

O how true are the words of Jesus Christ to his disciples at the Last Supper! "With desire I have desired to eat this pasch with you." God desires that we should receive him. He commands us to receive him; he threatens us with hell-fire if we refuse; he punishes us in purgatory if we are careless in receiving him. He promises to forgive all our ingratitude, to remit the temporal punishment due to our sins, nay, to give us heaven itself, if we only receive him. He promises a special reward to those of his priests who induce the faithful to receive him; and, as if all this were not enough, he employs his angels and saints, yea, his own omnipotence, to convey the Blessed Sacrament to those who are prevented from receiving him. Shall we not, then, endeavor to gratify this desire of our Lord? Jesus, our King, the Creator of heaven and earth, longs to be with us; and shall not we, his creatures and subjects, long to be with him? Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, desires to feed his sheep, and shall not the sheep know his voice and follow him?

Ah, if we knew that some wealthy prince had so set his heart on us that he was eager to dwell with us, how impatiently would we expect his arrival, how eagerly would we count the days and hours until he had come! Now, Jesus Christ is far greater and richer than any earthly prince. What greater honor can we imagine than that of receiving our God and Saviour? And shall we say: "Delay, O Lord; come not now; wait a little longer!" Alas! that



any Christians can be found to speak thus! Can we conceive any thing more extraordinary than that a man who believes and knows that God desires to unite himself to his soul, should yet remain indifferent to so great a favor? Can anything show more clearly how the world and sin have usurped the place of God in the human heart, and blinded it to its true happiness? Let me warn you, at least, dear reader, against such folly and ingratitude. If your own desire does not impel you to receive holy communion, at least let the desire of Jesus Christ urge you. Do not stay away because your love is cold; go, and your love will grow warm. Begin by going to please our Lord, and you will keep on to please yourself. This sacrament is the great means of advancing in divine love. Those who taste a little honey desire to eat more; but those who know not its sweetness have no desire to taste it. In like manner, this heavenly banquet continually satisfies and renews our spiritual hunger.

The saints, by often receiving their Saviour, were at last filled with such a longing desire to possess him, that they suffered inexpressible pain until this desire was gratified. St. Theresa's desire for holy communion was so great that she used to say, that neither fire nor sword could deter her from receiving her divine Lord. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi used to go to that part of the communion rail where the priest came first to distribute the Blessed Sacrament, in order to receive our Lord as quickly as possible. St. Philip Neri was often unable to sleep at night, on account of his great desire to receive holy communion. One night, as Father Antonio Galonio was about to give him holy communion, he held the sacred host in his hand for some time; at last, St.

Philip, unable to endure the delay any longer, cried out: "Antonio, why do you hold my Lord in your hands so long? Why do you not give him to me? Why? why? Give him to me; give him to me!" It is also related that this saint, when taking the precious blood at Mass, used to press his lips to the chalice with such affection that it seemed as if he could not tear himself away from it. He thus gradually wore off the gilding on the rim of the chalice. But still more remarkable is that which is related of St. Alphonsus. Once, on Good Friday, being unable to receive holy communion, his affliction was so great that a violent fever came on him; his life was even in danger. The doctor came and bled him, but there was no improvement until the next day, when the saint learned that he could again receive his Saviour. On receiving these joyful tidings, the fever immediately left him. "*Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus*"—Come, then, and taste this heavenly food for yourself. Let neither the example of others, nor the pleasures of the world, nor the coldness of your own heart deprive you of so rich a consolation. How truly does the author of the Imitation of Christ remark: "If Jesus Christ were offered only in one city in the world, how cheerfully would men endure even the greatest hardships to go to that favored spot! How would they long for the time when they could receive their God! Many holy pilgrims have undertaken long and arduous journeys, and have encountered dreadful perils by land and sea, only that they might be able to weep in the places in which our Saviour suffered, and to kiss the ground on which he trod." What is there, then, that should prevent you from receiving your Saviour himself? Should you not be willing to sacrifice everything—to sacrifice health and riches,

and life itself, that you may be deemed worthy of so great a favor? So, at least, thought the Christians of other days.

I need not refer you to the examples of the early Christians—there are instances even in later times. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth, a Catholic nobleman in England, was fined four hundred crowns for having received holy communion ; but, regardless of the iniquitous law, he continued to communicate, cheerfully paying the fine each time he was detected, although he was thereby obliged to sell two of his best estates. He declared that he never spent any money more cheerfully than that which he was obliged to pay for the privilege of receiving his Lord. (Schmid's *Histor. Catech.*) Still more affecting is the example which is related of a dying man, in the time of St. Charles Borromeo, archbishop of Milan. A dreadful pestilence had broken out in the city, and a certain man in the hospital of St. Gregory having been attacked by it, was soon reduced to the last extremity. In this state he was carried, more dead than alive, to a place where the dead bodies were thrown before being buried. Life, however, was not yet quite extinct, and, after a night spent in this horrible situation, he heard, in the morning, the sound of the bell announcing the approach of the Blessed Sacrament. Seized with an ardent desire of receiving his Saviour, he extricated himself with great difficulty from the dead bodies that were piled upon him, and, crawling to the feet of the priest who carried the holy viaticum, he conjured him to give him holy communion. The priest, touched with compassion, immediately communicated him ; but the efforts the poor man had made were too much for his feeble strength, and while his lips were yet moving in prayer, and his eyes looking up to heaven, he fell back cold and lifeless at the feet of the priest.

You, dear reader, have no such efforts, no such sacrifices to make, in order to receive your Lord ; you need not undertake long journeys nor cross stormy seas and high mountains : Jesus Christ is at your door ; you have but to go to the church and you will find him. You have everything to gain and nothing to lose, in receiving holy communion. Avail yourself, then, of so great a privilege. If you have communicated hitherto but seldom, communicate oftener, for the future. Our Lord himself entreats you to do so ; he repeats the cry he uttered on the cross : “*Sitio !*”—*I thirst*. And for what does he thirst ? He thirsts for your love ; he urges you as he did Zaccheus : “*Make haste, for to-day I must abide in thy house.*” O how exceedingly great is the reward of those who obey this loving invitation ! Does not Jesus Christ declare that he will recompense those who receive him, and show mercy to him in the person of the poor ? How much more will he reward those who receive him and show mercy to him in person ! To such he will say, “*I was naked*” in the Blessed Sacrament, stripped of my glory, and your faith, reverence and devotion supplied what was wanting to my majesty ; I was “*imprisoned*” in the form of bread and wine, and “*sick*” with love for you, and you did lovingly visit me and refresh me ; I was a “*stranger*,” unknown to the greater part of mankind, and you gave me your heart for my abode ; I was “*hungry*” and “*thirsty*,” consumed with the desire of possessing your affections entirely, and you endeavored to satisfy my desire. “*Come, then, blessed of my Father, possess the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.*”

Communicate, then, often, O Christian, and communicate with the proper dispositions : that is, with a lively faith,



a firm hope, an ardent charity, a deep humility, and a heart-felt desire to receive him. Do not be content with keeping yourself free from mortal sin; try to keep yourself free from venial sin also, at least those sins which are fully deliberate; for, though venial sins do not extinguish love in our hearts, they greatly weaken its force and fervor. Strive also to wean your heart from creatures; endeavor to mortify your attachment to honors, riches, and pleasures; spare no pains to gain the kingdom of heaven; practise frequent acts of self-denial; keep yourself always in the fear of God, and strive to adorn your soul with the virtues which Jesus Christ especially loves—humility, meekness, patience, prayer, charity, faith, peace, and recollection. On the eve of your communion, renew your good resolutions; spend some moments in prayer; go to rest with the thought, “to-morrow I shall receive my Saviour;” and if you awake in the night, think of the great action you are about to perform. In the morning make again acts of love, humility, contrition and confidence, and then go forward to the altar with a sincere desire to love and honor Jesus Christ more and more. Do what you can, and however imperfect that may be, it will be acceptable to Jesus Christ, provided he sees in you a true desire to do more. By such communions you will gain the precious graces which are imparted by this holy sacrament, for they will be indeed real communions, real unions of Jesus Christ with your soul.

I will conclude with the following example. Father Hunolt, of the Society of Jesus, relates that two students once agreed that, if God allowed it, he who should die first would appear to the other, and tell him how he fared in the other world. Shortly afterwards one of them died, and

appeared soon after to his fellow-student, all shining with heavenly glory, and told him that, by the mercy of God, he was saved, and was in possession of the bliss of heaven. The other congratulated him on his felicity, and asked how he had merited such unspeakable glory and bliss: "Chiefly," said the happy soul, "by the care with which I endeavored to receive holy communion with a pure heart." At these words the spirit disappeared, leaving in his surviving friend feelings of great consolation, and an ardent zeal to imitate his devotion. "If you know these things, blessed shall you be if you do them." (John xiii., 17.)

Our preparation for communion, however, should not be confined to the soul alone; it should also extend to the body: we are to receive holy communion fasting, having neither eaten nor drunk, at least from the preceding midnight. The custom of receiving communion fasting, has prevailed from the very time of the apostles, though it is not quite certain at what date it became obligatory throughout the whole Church. This law of the Church, which is intended to secure greater reverence for the Blessed Sacrament, is founded on the most evident reasons of propriety, so much so that St. Augustine takes it for granted that no Christian would be guilty of the irreverence of taking anything into his mouth before receiving the body of the Lord. (Epist. 54.)

It is strictly forbidden to swallow even the smallest quantity of food or drink. According to the common opinion of theologians, however, what is taken, must be, in the first place, something external—"ab extrinseco." Hence, to swallow one's saliva, or blood coming from the gums or teeth, etc., is no violation of the fast.

Secondly, what is taken must be received as food or

drink. Hence, it is not a violation of the fast to snuff or smoke, though some particles may reach the stomach, or to swallow along with the saliva some drops of the water used in washing the mouth, or particles of the food that, from the previous day, may have adhered to the gums or the teeth. Here, something depends on the intention. If any of these things be swallowed purposely, the fast, according to a very probable opinion, is broken; but the fast is not broken if they be inhaled or become mixed with the saliva, and thus pass into the stomach unintentionally. St. Alphonsus observes that one should not be scrupulous in this matter. Thirdly, it must be something which gives nutriment, or is capable of being digested. Hence, to swallow a bit of metal, a small pebble, or the like, is no violation of the fast.

### **3. Who are not obliged to be fasting ?**

*Those who are dangerously ill.*

There are certain cases in which holy communion may be received by those who are not fasting. 1. When it is administered by way of viaticum to those who are in danger of death. In this case, such persons are exempt from the obligation of fasting. 2. When the Blessed Sacrament is received, in order to protect it from irreverence.

### **4. Are we bound to receive Holy Communion ?**

*Yes; we are obliged to receive Communion under pain of eternal damnation.*

By original sin—the sin of our first parents—man was injured in body and soul. By the fall, reason was darkened, the will weakened, and the heart became more inclined to evil than to good. Now, as body and soul were both injured by sin, so there must be a medicine for both body

and soul. This medicine is the sacred body and soul of Jesus Christ; it is his sacred flesh and blood, united with his soul and divinity in the Blessed Sacrament. Our dear Saviour and divine Physician has instituted this great sacrament, and commands us to receive it under pain of death.

“Amen, amen, I say unto you, except you eat of the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you.” (John vi., 54.) From these words of our Lord it is clear that we are bound to receive holy communion, and that, if we neglect to do so, we shall be severely punished. During the life-time of the apostles, the faithful received holy communion every day. (Acts ii., 42.) All who then professed the faith of Christ, burned with such sincere charity, that, devoting themselves unceasingly to prayer and other good works, they were prepared to receive, every day, our Lord’s sacred body. But, subsequently, when charity and devotion had grown so cold that the faithful received holy communion only rarely, it was decreed by Pope Fabian, that all should communicate three times a year: at Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. When, at length, such was the decay of piety that not only was this holy and salutary ordinance unobserved, but communion was deferred even for years, it was decreed, in the Council of Lateran, that all the faithful should communicate at least once a year, at Easter-tide, and that those who neglected to do so, should be excluded from the Church. (Can. 1, cit. de poen. et remiss., c. Omnis.)

Every Christian, therefore, is obliged to receive holy communion once a year, in the paschal time, under penalty of being liable to excommunication, and of being deprived of Christian burial after death.



Every Christian is also obliged to receive holy communion by way of viaticum, whenever he is in danger of death by sickness. I say in *danger*, for he should not wait till there is no hope of recovery. By waiting too long, the sick man runs the risk of dying without receiving the viaticum.

The Church, then, has declared that every Christian is obliged, under pain of mortal sin, to receive communion on two occasions, that is, in the paschal time, and in danger of death. "But we should bear in mind," says St. Alphonsus, "that he who receives holy communion only once a year, will hardly persevere in the grace of God. This we know by experience; and reason teaches, that when the soul is a long time without this divine food, she scarcely has strength to resist the temptations of the devil, and therefore easily falls into sin. The most holy sacrament is called heavenly bread, because as earthly bread supports the life of the body, so does this heavenly bread preserve the life of the soul." How often, then, should we receive holy communion? I answer with St. Augustine: "Live in such a manner as to be able to receive daily." (De verbis Domini, serm. 28.) The holy apostles and the fathers of the Church taught the Christians of their time to communicate every day. "Continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they took their meat with gladness and simplicity of heart." (Lib. v. de Sacr. c. 4.) The best interpreters affirm, that the words, "breaking of bread," signify the holy communion. St. Jerome and the earliest writers testify to the fact that the first Christians communicated every day; and St. Thomas says: "It is certain that in the early ages, all who assisted at Mass received holy communion." St. Ambrose says: (Acts ii., 46.) "Receive the Holy Eucharist

every day, if permitted, so that each day it may become useful to you." St. Basil says : (Epist. ad Cæsar.) It is useful to communicate every day, to partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ." "The Holy Eucharist," says St. Augustine, "is your daily bread, necessary for this life." (Homil. xliii., in Quinqua.) The Council of Trent taught the same doctrine to her children : "The sacred and holy synod would wish indeed that, at each Mass, the faithful who are present should communicate, not only by spiritual desire, but also by the sacramental participation of the Eucharist." (Sess. xxii., c. 6.) And the holy council (Sess. xiii., c. 8.) in the most touching manner exhorts the faithful to frequent communion: "The holy synod, with true fatherly affection, admonishes, exhorts, begs, and beseeches, through the mercy of our Lord, all the faithful, mindful of the exceeding love of our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave his own soul as the price of our salvation, and gave us his own flesh to eat, to believe and venerate those sacred mysteries of his body and blood with such constancy and firmness of faith, with such devotion of soul, with such piety and worship, as to be able frequently to receive that supernatural bread, that it may be to them truly the life of the soul, and the perpetual health of their mind ; and that, being invigorated by the strength thereof, they may, after having finished their earthly pilgrimage, arrive at their heavenly country ; there to eat, without veil, that same bread of angels which they now eat under the sacramental veils." Pope Benedict XIV. (Bullar. tom. i., p. 440,) expresses the ardent desire of seeing once more in the Church the fervor and the daily communion of the first centuries. St. Thomas says : "The sacrament of the Eucharist has been instituted for the salvation of mankind ; therefore, we ought to participate

in it every day, so as to partake, each day, of its fruits. (Pars iii., quest. 80, art. 81.) St. Charles Borromeo says : “ Let the pastors frequently exhort the faithful to the salutary practice of frequent communion, by the example and practice of the primitive Church, by the words and testimonies of the Fathers of the Church, and, finally, by the sentiments of the Council of Trent, which wishes us to communicate each time that we assist at Mass.” (Council iii., p. 74.)

But what is meant by frequent communion? By frequent communion the approved writers of the Church understand communion every day, or several days in the week, or at least oftener than once a week. St. Alphonsus Liguori, the learned bishop and doctor of the Church, repeats, again and again, that communion once a week is not frequent communion. The holy doctor says : “ Monthly or weekly communion cannot be called frequent, on account of the great coldness of these unhappy times ; according to the ancient discipline of the Church, it should be called rare rather than frequent.

“ Tell me now,” says Bishop de Segur in his little treatise on weekly communion, “ are we right or wrong, we priests who exhort all men of good will to frequent communion ?

“ And the priests who do not urge the faithful to communicate often, who do not speak of it in their instructions, who do not excite and accustom the children to it after their First Communion, and who, consequently, let them fall into mortal sin and remain in sin ; the priests who do not lift up their voice in the pulpit and in the confessional, and exhort fathers and mothers of families, young men and young women, children and the aged, the poor and the rich, in a word, all the faithful, to frequent communion—

are such priests doing their duty, and obeying the instructions of the Church? Evidently not.

“And if such priests accuse us of allowing too great privileges to our penitents, when we are only following out the precepts of the Church—what does it matter? Are we doing anything more than our duty? And if they accuse us of asking too much—O, I would beg any candid reader to take the decrees of the Council of Trent in hand, and say whether we are going beyond the recommendations of the Church and the Holy See, or stopping short of them. Be so good as to look again at the passage I have quoted above. You will remark that the *Roman Catechism* speaks in it of ‘communicating *every day*,’ not *once a week*, as I advise. I do not even come up to the Church’s standard. Instead of going beyond it, I am modifying it, in order more easily to bring souls to the love of Jesus Christ.

“It was Quinquagesima Sunday, in 1861, when Pope Pius IX. had assembled in the throne-room of the Vatican the parish priests and the Lenten preachers, in order to commission them, and to give them some particular instructions.

“A table was placed near his Holiness, and on it was a number of little tracts.

“Perceiving that many of the priests looked with surprise and curiosity at the piles of little books, the Holy Father made a short address to them:

“‘You are wondering,’ said he, ‘at this mass of tracts. They are copies of a little book on frequent communion, which has already done much good. It ought to be given to every child when making his First Communion. Every parish priest ought to have it, as it contains the original rules about holy communion promulgated by the Council of Trent, which I wish to be known and followed.’



“And for a quarter of an hour, with all the eloquence of his apostolic zeal, the Holy Father dwelt on the excellence and advantages of frequent communion, and gave instructions to his parish priests and preachers specially to insist upon it during that Lent. Then, with his own hand, he gave to each priest several copies of the little work, ordering that the rest (6,000 in number) should be distributed through all the parishes in Rome. He had it printed at his own expense.

“According to the explicit teaching of the Holy See, then, the doctrine of frequent communion is the doctrine of the Church. Every priest is obliged, in conscience, to submit to it as regards both himself and others. He is bound, in conscience, to teach it often, and to exhort the faithful, young and old, to put it in practice. Moreover, he would endanger his own salvation if, by insisting too rigorously on the dispositions necessary for holy communion, he were to frighten souls away from their Saviour and good Shepherd.”

Now, what dispositions should the confessor require in a Christian, in order to admit him to frequent communion? To receive holy communion every day, or several times a week, we must be free, not only from mortal sin, but also from every affection for deliberate venial sin. Pope Benedict XIV: (*De Syn. lib. vii., c. 12, n. 9.*) says: “Confessors should not allow frequent communion to those who, avoiding mortal sin, yet retain an affection for venial faults, of which they do not wish to correct themselves.” St. Alphonsus says: “It is an error to grant frequent communion—that is, several times in the week—to those who commit venial faults, for which they retain an affection, and of which they do not wish to rid themselves. Hence,

a person who commits deliberate venial sins by telling wilful lies, by vanity in dress, by wilful feelings of dislike, by inordinate attachments, or who is guilty of other similar faults which he knows to be an obstacle to his advancement in perfection, and who does not endeavor to correct these defects, especially if these defects were against humility or obedience, that person cannot be permitted to communicate oftener than once a week." (Praxis clxix., and *Spouse of Christ*, p. 635.) From this, however, it does not follow that the frequent communicant must avoid all venial sins. To be exempt from venial sin is one thing, and to be exempt from an affection for venial sin is another. The Council of Trent teaches (Sess. vi., c. 23) that it is impossible, without a special privilege of grace, to avoid all venial sin. That privilege belonged to the Immaculate Mother of God alone. A holy soul may and will sometimes fall into venial faults, but she has no affection for them as long as she hates and detests them, and endeavors to avoid them for the time to come. On the other hand, the soul has an affection for those venial faults, which she continues to commit deliberately, into which she easily and frequently falls, without making any effort to avoid or correct them. St. Francis de Sales says: "We can never be perfectly exempt from venial sins, but we can very well avoid all affection for venial sin. Truly, it is one thing to tell a lie once or twice, with full deliberation, in a matter of little importance, and another thing to take pleasure in lying, and to be addicted to that kind of sin. Affection for venial sin is contrary to devotion; it weakens the strength of the soul, prevents divine consolations, opens the door to temptations, and, if it does not kill the soul, it renders it extremely weak, and it is in this that the affection for venial

sin differs from the sin itself. If a soul falls into venial sin, but does not continue long therein, it does not injure it so much; but should these same venial sins remain in the soul by the affection it feels for them, they cause it to lose the grace of devotion."

St. Alphonsus allows one exception to this general rule. He says: (Praxis. Num. 149.) "It is sometimes good and desirable to allow frequent communion to those who are in danger of falling into mortal sin, that they may receive grace and strength to resist temptation." This holy doctor relates, "that a certain nobleman was so habitually addicted to a certain grievous and sensual sin, that he despaired of overcoming this bad habit. Having communicated every day for several weeks, according to the advice of his confessor, he was at last entirely delivered from the vice which had tyrannized over him so long, and he never afterwards committed a sin against the holy virtue of purity."

A person, then, who endeavors to avoid and rid himself of venial faults, performs mental prayer according to his capacity and state of life, says the beads and hears Mass on week-days, makes his spiritual reading, daily performs all his actions with the intention to please God, practises little acts of humility, self-denial, and mortification of the senses, watches and obeys the inspirations of God, pays a visit to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the Blessed Virgin, is a very fit subject for frequent communion. "If any one finds by experience," says St. Thomas, "that by daily communion the fervor of his love is increased, and his reverence not diminished, such a person ought to communicate every day." (In 4 Sent., 2, 9, 3, art. 1.) "But as to all those," says St. Alphonsus, "who live without much devotion, let them receive holy communion every

Sunday, or at least every fortnight, in order to be able to keep themselves in the grace of God." (Commandments, p. 260.)

Our dear Saviour has indeed the greatest desire to unite himself to our souls every day by means of holy communion. He makes this desire known by his priests. But there are ever so many who heed neither this desire of our Lord nor the exhortations of his priests to receive communion frequently. Such are the allurements of sin and the cunning of the devil, that almost every one has some excuse to give why he at least should not receive communion frequently.

There is one. Ask him why he does not go often to communion. He will answer, "It is because I do not receive those great graces we hear of in sermons or read of in the lives of the saints." But, I ask, how do you know that you do not receive these graces? Is it because you do not *feel* them? But this is no certain proof that you do not really receive them. If you were sick and had no relish for food, would the food, on that account, cease to nourish you? Now it is the same with regard to the Blessed Sacrament, the spiritual food of your soul. Consolations and delights are graces which God bestows when and upon whom he thinks fit; and if he often deprives his servants of them, it is to try them, to keep them humble, and to give them an opportunity of meriting greater graces. As corporal food nourishes you and makes you strong without your perceiving it, so also, does this heavenly food silently and imperceptibly enrich your soul with grace. You cannot see a plant grow, but you can see very well that it has grown; in like manner, you do not see your soul grow in the spiritual life by



receiving holy communion, yet experience shows that it really does grow. You now live in the fear of God ; you have not committed a mortal sin for years, perhaps not even in your whole life. You do not grow lukewarm in the practice of virtue ; you fulfil your duties faithfully. Are not all *these* great graces and favors ? and are they not all the admirable effects of holy communion ? Is not the remedy that protects us against disease better than the one that restores us to health ? But let us suppose the truth of what you allege. I ask you, why do you not receive great fruit from this sacrament ? Do you prepare yourself sufficiently ? Do you not approach the altar negligently ? Do you consider beforehand what you are about to do ; and afterwards, do you reflect sufficiently on what you have done ? Or do you commit venial sins wilfully and with full deliberation ? Are not these the reasons why you fail to derive, from the reception of this sacrament, that profit which others draw from it ? If so, you must ascribe the fault only to yourself.

There is another. Ask him why he does not receive communion frequently ; he will answer : “ It is because I fear to lose the proper reverence for holy communion. The proverb says : ‘ Familiarity begets contempt.’ ”

To this I reply : The proverb is true in regard to men, but not in regard to God. The more familiar you become with men, the more faults and defects you discover in them ; and on this account you will feel less respect for them : but this is not the case with God. The more intimate you become with him, the oftener you approach him, the better you become acquainted with him, the more perfections you will discover in him, and the more you will love him. Is it not a blasphemy to say, that to converse with God makes a

man more wicked; and that, in order to be a saint, we must withdraw from him? Can the most perfect exercise of religion lessen the respect which we owe to this sacrament? When do you make acts of faith, hope, love, adoration and humility, if not after communion? The Church insisted upon daily communion in the first ages of Christianity; and she now strongly *recommends* it by the Council of Trent. Can the holy Church recommend or advise anything sinful?

There is another. Ask him: Why do you receive holy communion so seldom? He will answer: "It is because I fear to receive it unworthily." To such a one I would say: I suppose you mean that you do not know for certain, that you are in the state of grace. It is true, we are required to be in the state of grace, but we are not required to have any greater certainty of it than that which is ordinarily given to good Christians. Will you wait till an angel comes down from heaven to tell you that you are in the state of grace? Do you not know, that you can place far more reliance on the assurance of your confessor, than on that of an angel? If an angel should appear to you, you might have some reason to fear that it was the devil, come to deceive you; but you know that in listening to your confessor, you have the promise of Christ that you shall not be led astray. Hence, St. Alphonsus says: "Place more confidence in the priest of God than in the revelations of all the angels of heaven." He adds, moreover, that there is no species of disobedience more hurtful than to omit a communion prescribed by one's confessor, because such disobedience proceeds from a want of humility. Therefore, when you have the permission of your director, go forward with confidence. No one goes tremblingly to

a feast, but cheerfully and joyfully. The Son of God does not appear on our altars under the appearance of bread, in order to be feared, but to be approached with love. Besides, if you fear to approach this sacrament, why do you not also fear to stay away from it? The Son of God declares, in the parable, that the guests who declined their lord's invitation to the banquet were forever excluded from his friendship, even though their excuses for staying away had some plausibility. Should not their fate cause you to fear for yourself?

Ask another, why he does not communicate. "Oh," he says, "I wish indeed to receive often, and trust that I am in the grace of God, but I am so much afraid of committing a sacrilege." To this I answer: No one commits a sacrilege without knowing and intending it. This excuse is but a trick of the devil. O execrable malice of Satan! By the promise of a happy life he induced our first parents to eat of that fruit which brought death into the world, and now he makes every effort to prevent Christians from eating the true bread of life, by inspiring them with the foolish fear that this living bread of life will prove the cause of their eternal death!

There is another. He does not communicate often, "because," as he says, "he commits so many faults that it would seem like presumption in him to receive holy communion so often."

I answer: It is no presumption for one who has many imperfections and defects to go often to communion. Nay, it is not presumptuous to go, even though one commits many faults, provided they are not altogether wilful and deliberate. Do you think you will commit fewer faults by staying away from communion? Can you avoid sin without God's grace? And how will you obtain his grace

if not from this sacrament? I would rather advise you to go often, *because* you are so imperfect; for, the longer you stay away, the more imperfect you will become. The Church teaches that the Holy Eucharist is food and medicine: food for the healthy, and medicine for the sick. Hence a holy Dominican nun used to say: "For my part, being sensible of my unworthiness, I would wish to communicate three times a day; for, by more frequent communion, I should hope to render myself more worthy." Did not the Son of God say to the Pharisees, who were scandalized at seeing him eat with sinners: "They who are in health need not a physician, but they that are sick." You say, "I am not worthy," thinking, perhaps, that such a sentiment proceeds from humility; but it is generally a greater proof of humility to receive frequently than to receive seldom, because he who receives frequently the remedy for his ailments, clearly acknowledges his many infirmities. If your abstaining from holy communion proceeds really from humility, it is of course not displeasing to God; but it would be a thousand times more acceptable to him if you would join confidence to humility. Fear is good, but love is far better.

One day, when St. Frances of Rome was going to communion, the devil said to her: "How can you, who are so full of venial sins, dare to receive the Immaculate Lamb!" She instantly perceived that the enemy intended to deprive her of so great a blessing, and silenced him by spitting in his face. After this the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and, having praised her conduct, she said that our defects, instead of being an obstacle, should be an incentive to communion, since in communion we find the remedy for all our miseries.



There is another who says: "I communicate seldom, because I am not worthy to go to communion so often." I answer: If you mean that, in order to receive holy communion you must have a holiness equal to the holiness of him whom you receive, then not even the Blessed Virgin was worthy. If you mean that you must have stainless purity, then the apostles were unworthy, because even they had imperfections and defects. The first Christians, too, had certainly their faults, and yet they communicated daily. But you mean, perhaps, that you must make a suitable preparation. Now the Church declares that the necessary preparation consists in not having, knowingly, a mortal sin on your conscience. She advises, indeed, and exhorts her children to prepare themselves with great fervor, to avoid every wilful venial sin, and to strive earnestly to correct their faults. What is it, then, that keeps you from holy communion? Do not fancy that the Son of God requires, as a preparation for the reception of the sacrament, that which is properly its fruit. Who ever heard of a physician requiring a sick person to be healthy, as a preparation for taking his medicine? Holiness and purity of soul are the effects of this sacrament, according to the declaration of the Council of Trent; is it not, then, folly to require them as a necessary preparation for its reception? Tell me, if those virtues were required, who could ever communicate, even at Easter?

Ask another why he approaches holy communion so seldom. "Alas!" he answers, "I have offended Almighty God so often and so grievously in my past life that I dare not go often to holy communion." I answer: Have you offended God more grievously than St. Augustine? Have you committed more sins than St. Margaret of Cortona?

And yet our Lord one day told this saint that he would give her confessor a great reward for having advised her to go often to communion.

Have you forgotten what our Lord said to the venerable Prudentiana Zagnoni: "If you receive me frequently in holy communion, I will forget all your ingratitude"? Remember, it was for the sake of sinners that the Son of God came down from heaven. If you are truly sorry for your sins, if you have sincerely confessed them, if you are firmly resolved not to sin any more, then you have even a special *right* and *claim* to communion. Our Lord said: "I am not come to call the just, but sinners to repentance."

There is another. "I fear," he says, "that if I go often to holy communion, I may at last do it out of mere custom." I answer: A good custom is a good thing. Ought you to give up hearing Mass daily from fear of becoming used to it, or omit your daily prayers from an apprehension of praying through custom?

Another one stays away from holy communion because he says, "he feels so cold, distracted and indevout when about to receive communion." I answer: There is a great difference between devotion and the feeling of devotion. One may have much devotion without feeling it at all. Sensible devotion is not always the best, for it is liable to many illusions. Besides this, it does not always depend upon us. God grants it to whom he pleases. If sensible devotion were required, most undoubtedly those who have not it would not be allowed to receive holy communion, even at Easter. If you feel no devotion, humble yourself before God, but do not stay away from him. The devotion which is necessary for receiving holy communion consists in approaching your Lord with humility, confidence and love;

with a desire to honor him, to unite yourself to him, and to obey him. You say : "I am so cold ;" but tell me, will you become warm by staying away from the fire ? Would it not be wiser to go to communion, in order to become devout ? Do you not know that holy communion is a fire which enkindles love, devotion and spiritual joy in the heart ? Is it not true that the less you receive, the less desire you have to receive ; and that the oftener you receive, the more you wish to receive ?

"I do not receive communion more frequently," says another, "because I feel more devotion when I receive but seldom." To this I reply : What you say may be true, in your case. At all events, it will always remain true that, if you communicate but seldom, your soul will lack grace and fervor. He who would keep a continual fast would become very weak, although he might take his scanty food with the keenest relish.

"I would receive oftener," says another one, "but my confessor does not allow me." I answer : If this is really the case, you must obey him, but you must try to supply the want of the holy sacrament by multiplying your spiritual communions. Say to Jesus : "Dear Lord, I would gladly receive thee more frequently but I am prevented by obedience," and he will be pleased with your obedience and your desire for holy communion. But, are you certain that your confessor is not inclined to allow you frequent communion ? Do you often *ask leave* to communicate more frequently ? This, at least, is in your power, and it is very useful, and by no means opposed to the perfection of obedience. Your confessor knows that, to produce great fruit, this divine food must be eaten with hunger ; and as long as you show but little eagerness for the holy sacrament, he

will not advise or permit you to communicate often. But, perhaps, you *have* asked for it several times, and he has not granted your request. Well, and *how* did you ask? Did you imitate St. Catharine of Sienna, who, when deprived of communion by her confessor, exclaimed: "Father, give my soul its food!" Had you, like her, manifested with humility and resignation this holy hunger, your confessor would, I am sure, have treated you very differently; but, because you appear cold and not unwilling to be repulsed, he prudently abstains from advising you to receive communion very often.

"I seldom receive holy communion," says another, "because I have not sufficient time to prepare myself." I answer: How much time do you need for preparation? Must you spend the whole morning in prayer or in reading pious books? St. Theresa received communion every day for twenty-three years. Do you think she had nothing else to attend to? I think she was more busy than you will ever be. The first Christians went to communion daily; do you imagine their occupations were of less consequence than yours, or their family affairs less troublesome? Shall I tell you the reason why the saints and first Christians were able to prepare themselves for daily communion? They were more fervent than the Christians of the present day; they had a greater love for Jesus Christ. If you foresee that you will not have time in the morning to prepare for communion, endeavor, the preceding evening, to make some preparation, by reading a pious book and making the acts which ought to be made in the morning; or, rise a little before the usual time, and spend whatever time may be at your disposal in preparing yourself as well as you can. Endeavor, moreover, to perform the



duties of your state with a view to please God, and you may rest assured that this will be an excellent preparation for your communion. St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi used to say to her sisters in religion: "Offer to God all your actions as a preparation for communion; perform them with the intention of pleasing him, and communicate."

"I," says another, "abstain from frequent communion, because I wish to avoid the remarks of others." I answer: If you communicate by the advice of your confessor, and through a desire of correcting your faults and advancing in divine love, you need not be disturbed at what others may say about you. Father Avila used to say that they who censured their neighbors for receiving communion frequently, perform the office of the devil. Why, then, should you pay attention to such people? If it be wrong to listen to the devil, is it right to listen to his agents? Do you not know that everything good must meet with contradiction? Let people say what they please; on the day of judgment they will find out their mistake, and then they will despise you for having listened to them.

"Why should I receive communion so often," says another, "since the Church does not command me to receive oftener than once a year? In obeying her I cannot go astray." I answer: If the Church commanded you to eat your dinner only once a year, would you be so exact in keeping to the letter of the law? The Church requires you to abstain from flesh-meat on Fridays, and to fast during Lent and at other times; do you never, for some slight cause, seek exemption from this precept? How is it that, for the most part, those who are such literal interpreters of the law of Easter Communion, are so lax

in the observance of the law of fasting? How is it, that they who find one communion a year just enough, generally complain of one Lent a year as a great deal too much? Ah! I fear that faith and reverence for the Church have but little share in this excuse, and that the real reason of your urging this precept, is the earthliness and sordidness of your affections. Your desires are low and grovelling; you have more relish for the food of the body than for the food of the soul. With the Israelites in the desert, you prefer the good things of Egypt to the Manna that comes from heaven. Your taste is so corrupted by the impure pleasures of this world, that you can find no delight in the sweet fountains that flow from the Saviour's side. Believe me, this is no good sign; it is rather a sign that you are in great danger of losing your soul; for, as the Royal Prophet has said, "Behold, they that go far from God shall perish." But I have another remark to make on this excuse of yours. You have not represented the precept of the Church quite correctly. You have left out an important word. The Church says that her children must receive holy communion "*at least* once a year." I will tell you why. In former times Christians were accustomed to communicate every day, and then their lives were holy, and edifying, and chaste, and humble; and infidels and heretics, struck with the purity of their manners, were converted to the faith in crowds. But, in after ages, luxury crept in, and the world and the flesh had too much sway, and many grew cold in love and lost all relish for this heavenly food. Now, what can the Church do to cure this evil? If she were to make it *obligatory* on all to receive holy communion frequently, she would run the risk of multiplying mortal sins, and of plunging her

imperfect members more deeply into guilt. She uses, therefore, a wise and loving moderation, and, as a tender mother, when every other expedient fails, speaks sternly to her sick child, and forces it to take the food and medicine which are absolutely necessary to life,—she enjoins, under pain of mortal sin, a single communion in the year, *as the least which can be required of a Christian*. But is this all that she wishes us to do? Oh! no. She desires that we should continually nourish ourselves with the bread of life. In the Council of Trent, she bewails the disuse of daily communion, and earnestly exhorts all the faithful to a frequent use of this sanctifying food. Since, then, you insist so much on obedience to the Church, show the spirit of an obedient child, and fulfil her ardent wishes. It is true, you will not fall under her censures if you receive but once a year, but you will be a much better Christian if you receive more frequently.

“I,” says another, “do not see the necessity for communicating so often. There are many others who do not receive oftener than I, that is, once or twice a year, and yet they are good Christians; yea, as good as those who receive very often.”

I will not dispute your assertion. You cannot, however, see into the heart of another. It would be better for you to form as charitable a judgment as you can of your neighbors. I do not mean to say that all those who go often to communion, are exactly what they ought to be. But will any one assert that those who communicate but once or twice a year are always as exemplary in their conduct as those who communicate frequently? Point out to me those whom you consider the most pious; who live in the world without following its manners or adopting its

principles ; who, when adversity overtakes them, are calm and resigned to the will of God, and, when it overtakes their neighbor, are ready for every act of charity ; those who are meek and kind, rich in good works and fond of prayer ; those who are constant in their attendance at Mass, diligent in seeking spiritual instruction, faithful in their duties, and edifying in their conversation—and I will show you these same persons regularly at the altar every month, fortnight, or week ; yea, even oftener. Grant that, among these frequent communicants, there is but one who leads a truly devout life, you have sufficient evidence of the fruits of this sacrament ; for no one can live holily without the grace of God, and this sacrament was instituted to impart grace abundantly. “I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.” (John x., 10.) But, after all, is this the proper way to reason ? Do not ask whether others are good Christians, but whether you yourself are one. You know a *good Christian* means something more than one who does not rob or commit murder, or the like crimes. A good Christian means one who endeavors to keep his heart pure in the sight of God, and to overcome pride, envy, avarice, impurity and gluttony. Now, do *you* find *within* you no sting of the flesh, no movement of hatred or desire of revenge, no feeling of pride ? Palladius tells the story of a young man who, after endeavoring for a long time to corrupt a virtuous married woman, and, finding her chastity proof against all his assaults, sought to revenge himself upon her through the intervention of the devil. By the permission of God, the Evil One caused her to assume the appearance of a wild beast, and her husband, greatly distressed at so horrible a transformation, took her to St.



Macarius, that by his prayers and blessing she might be delivered from the malice of the devil. The saint easily effected this by his great power with God; and after the good woman was restored to her natural appearance, he gave her this advice: "In future, go oftener to communion than you have hitherto done; for, know that the reason why God permitted you to appear in such a form, is because you have been five weeks without receiving communion. So it has been revealed to me from on high: remember this and take it to heart."

Five weeks! and you stay away for five months, yea, for an entire year, and find no necessity for receiving oftener? And do you think the devil has been idle, and that no hideous transformation has taken place in your soul in the eyes of the angels? Has not your soul become a sow, in impurity? or a tiger, in rage? or a viper, in treachery? or a filthy creeping worm, in its low and grovelling affections? I leave it to yourself to answer. God grant that it may not be so. I know that it is the testimony and experience of the saints, that with all their efforts and the continual use of the sacraments, they found it a hard thing to keep their hearts clean; and if, for a short time, they were prevented from receiving the bread of heaven, their hearts became withered and dry, and they exclaimed: "I am smitten as grass, and my heart is withered, because I have forgotten to eat my bread." (Ps. c. 5.) I also know that Holy Scripture says: "They that go far from thee, O Lord, shall perish." (Ps. lxxii., 27.)

I think I have now sufficiently shown that there is no valid excuse for not communicating frequently, and that, for the most part, they who give these excuses are influenced by a secret unwillingness to lead a Christian life in

good earnest. They are unwilling to practise retirement, detachment from creatures and self-denial. They stay away from communion as long as they can, in order to avoid the rebuke of Jesus Christ for their sensuality, pride, vanity, uncharitableness and sloth. Sad, indeed, are the consequences of such conduct. Not being able to find true peace of heart in religion, such men seek their consolation in exterior things, and multiply faults and imperfections, in proportion as they withdraw from God. What is most lamentable is, that not unfrequently their venial sins lead to mortal sins, and they live in such a state for months, remaining in constant danger of being overtaken by a sudden and unprovided death, the just punishment of their ingratitude and indifference towards Jesus Christ.

I have said, "*for the most part,*" for I know there are cases in which reluctance to receive this sacrament proceeds from a vain fear of irreverence inspired by the teaching of misguided men. I have said enough already to show the groundlessness of such a fear and its offence to God; would that I could sufficiently express its hurtfulness to souls! St. Vincent of Paul, when speaking of this subject, used to relate the following example: "A noble and pious lady, who had long been in the habit of communicating several times a week, was so unhappy as to choose for her confessor a priest who was imbued with the principles of Jansenism. Her new director at first allowed her to go to holy communion once a week; but, after a while, he would not permit her to go oftener than once a fortnight, and at last he limited her to once a month. The lady went on in this way for eight months, when, wishing to know the state of her soul, she made a careful self-examination: but, alas!

she found her heart so full of irregular appetites, passions, and imperfections that she was actually afraid of herself. Horror-stricken at her deterioration, she exclaimed: "Miserable creature that I am! How deeply have I fallen! How wretchedly am I living! Where will all this end? What is the cause of this lamentable state of mine? I see! I see! It is for no other reason than for my having followed these new teachers, and for having abandoned the practice of frequent communion." Then, giving thanks to God, who had enlightened her to see her error, she renounced her false guide and resumed her former practice. Soon after she was enabled to get the better of her faults and passions, and to regain tranquillity of heart. O how effectually do such confessors perform the work of the devil! The great adversary of mankind has nothing so much at heart as to keep men away from the means of grace, especially the Blessed Eucharist. In his warfare against the faithful, he acts as the nations bordering upon Abyssinia are said to do in their conflicts with the inhabitants of that country. The Abyssinians are known to observe a strict fast of forty days at a certain period of the year, and it is the cruel custom of their enemies to wait until they are weakened by this long abstinence, and then to rush upon them and gain an easy victory. Thus, I say, it is with the devil; a forty days' fast from the Blessed Sacrament is a rich conquest for him. It is his greatest delight to keep men away from the altar. Every excuse for staying away from holy communion is legitimate in his eyes; every doctrine which teaches that it is useless or hurtful to go often to communion is stamped with his approval; every taunt with which a tepid Catholic upbraids his more fervent brother for nourishing his soul often with the bread

of life, is music in his ears. And the devil is right; for let men but once be persuaded to abstain from the strengthening body of Jesus Christ, and the work of Satan is no longer difficult. When the soul is weak in grace, by reason of long abstinence from the flesh of Jesus, then the Evil One attacks it with his temptations, and, almost without resistance, makes it his slave. Once more, those who discountenance frequent communion do the devil's work. They give hell much pleasure and deprive our Lord of great delight. It is on this account that our Lord so often visits with severe chastisements those who dissuade others from receiving him in communion. A woman who mocked St. Catharine of Sienna for going so often to holy communion, fell down and died instantly without being able to receive the Last Sacraments. Another woman, who committed the same offence, became crazy. Nay, even where the fault was much lighter, God has shown his displeasure. St. Ludgardis was in the habit of receiving holy communion very often, but her superioress, disapproving, forbade her to do so in future. The saint obeyed; but, at that very moment, her superioress fell sick, and suffered the most acute pains. At last, suspecting that her sickness was a punishment for having forbidden Ludgardis to communicate frequently, she withdrew the prohibition, when, lo! her pains immediately left her. Come, then, O Christian, to the heavenly banquet, which your divine Saviour has prepared for you. "All things are ready. Jesus Christ desires to unite himself to you. "Behold," he says, "I stand at the door and knock. Open to me, my sister, my beloved, my dove, my undefiled: for my head is full of dew, and my locks of the drops of the night." He has waited for you through a long night of sin, and now that he has restored you to the state of grace by



the Sacrament of Penance, he wishes to take up his abode in your heart, and to enrich you with his graces. Let no temptation whatever keep you from so great a good. With St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, say : "I would rather die than omit a communion permitted by obedience." As often as your director permits you, go forward and receive your Lord with confidence and simplicity of heart ; and to those who blame you for communicating so often, say, as St. Francis de Sales advises you to do : "If," says he, "they ask you why you communicate so often, tell them that two classes of persons should communicate frequently : the perfect to persevere in perfection, and the imperfect to attain perfection ; the strong not to become weak, and the weak to grow strong ; the sick to be cured, and the healthy to prevent sickness. And as to yourself, tell them that, because you are imperfect, weak and infirm, you stand in need of frequent communion." (Introduction to a Devout Life, c. 21.) Tell them you wish to become patient, and therefore you must receive your patient Saviour ; that you wish to become meek, and therefore you must receive your meek Saviour ; that you wish to love contempt, and therefore you must receive your despised Saviour ; that you wish to love crosses, and therefore you must receive your suffering Saviour ; that you wish to love poverty, and therefore you must receive your poor Saviour ; that you wish to become strong against the temptations of the devil, the flesh and the world, and therefore you stand in need of your comforting and strengthening Saviour. Tell them that Jesus has said : "He that eateth my flesh shall live by me." I wish to live, and therefore I receive Jesus, my Life, "that he may live in me and I in him?" He, in whose words you put your trust, will justify you ; your

soul will continually grow in virtue ; your heart will become more and more pure ; your passions will become weaker ; your faith more lively, your hope more firm, your charity more ardent ; you will receive grace to live in this world as an heir of heaven ; and when, at your last hour, the priest comes to administer the holy viaticum, you will be able to say with St. Theresa : “My Lord and my Bridegroom, so, the hour has come at last for which my heart has longed so much. Now is the time that we shall see each other face to face. Blessed be this hour ! Thy will be done ! O happy hour, in which my exile has an end, and my soul takes its flight to thee, for whom it has longed so much !”

**5. Is it also necessary to drink of the chalice, in order to receive the blood of Christ ?**

*No ; for, as Christ is living, his body and blood are entire under the appearance of bread, as well as under the appearance of wine.*

According to the ancient discipline of the Church, the faithful were allowed to communicate under both kinds or under one only. (St. Leo, serm. 4.) On many occasions, in all ages of the Church, communion was administered under one kind only. Infants, who, in ancient times, received communion, even before the use of reason, received under the form of wine only. (St. Cypr. Ep. 62.) In some churches the Holy Eucharist, under the form of bread only, was given to children approaching the use of reason. (Evagrius, lib. 4, Hist. Eccles.) The faithful, especially in times of persecution, carried the Blessed Sacrament, under the form of bread only, to their own houses, that they might have it in the hour of need ; but this was never done with the

species of wine. (Tertul. lib. 2, cap. 5 ; St. Basil, Ep. 289 ; St. Ambr. de Morte Frat. Satyr.) The practice of carrying the Sacrament to the sick is of apostolic origin and this was always done under the form of bread only. (Euseb. Hist. Eccles. lib. 6, cap. 44 ; P. Martenne de Antiq. Eccl. Ritib., lib. 1, cap. 4.) There were, formerly, certain days on which Mass was not said, and those who communicated on those days did so under the form of bread only, which was preserved from the Mass of the previous day ; but the Sacrament, under the form of wine, was not preserved in this manner, for fear of some accident. We have still a portion of this ancient practice. The priest, on Good Friday, communicates under the form of bread only, and this was consecrated the previous day ; formerly, all the people communicated in this manner on Good Friday. In some churches in France, this is still the practice. In the Greek Church, on the fast days of Lent, on which Mass is not said, the faithful communicate under the form of bread alone, which was consecrated on the previous Sunday. (Card. Bona, lib. 1, de Lyturg. cap. 15.)

The Church has never considered communion, under both kinds, as a precept of Jesus Christ. It is a precept of Christ for priests when they say Mass. But, with this exception, the Church has always regarded communion under both kinds as a matter of discipline, which may be changed, according to circumstances.

The reason why the Church has always considered communion under one or two kinds, as a matter of discipline, is because, as we have already seen, Christ is whole and entire under either kind, so that he who receives under one species, receives under both ; because under each are contained both the body and the blood of Christ. The practice

of the Church in this matter is confirmed by the scriptures. St. Paul (1 Cor. xi.) says that the unworthy reception of the sacrament under one kind only, is a profanation of both the body and blood of the Lord. He that shall eat this bread, or drink (mark the word "or") the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord,"—where the apostle evidently affirms that we may communicate under one kind. "He that eateth this bread," says Jesus Christ, "shall live for ever; and he that eateth me, shall live by me."

The reason why the Church no longer permits the faithful to receive under both kinds is, because one kind was always considered sufficient. And the custom of receiving under one kind had been fully established in the Church, when she forbade communion under both kinds. Certain heretics held erroneous notions on this point; and the decree forbidding the cup to the laity was made in opposition to their errors. In fine, the Church would have permitted the use of the cup, had she not found more inconvenience in granting it, than in refusing it. These inconveniences were: the carrying of the cup to the sick, who had ordinarily received in every age under only one kind; the difficulty of obtaining wine in some places; the great number of persons who could not drink wine, and who were affected even by its very odor; finally the dreadful accidents which sometimes happened by the effusion of the cup, and other accompanying inconveniences. This last inconvenience was obviated, for a time, by dipping the species of bread into that of the wine. But the Latin Church rejected this as somewhat irreverent, and, ever since, communion under one kind has been the universal practice. Such was the state of things in the 12th century, as is evident from



St. Thomas, (part iii. quest. 80, art. 12,) when John Huss began to excite disturbance in Bohemia, declaring that the use of the cup was absolutely necessary. The Council of Constance, in 1414, denounced this error, and, after mature consideration, ordered communion under only one kind. The Council of Trent followed the Council of Constance, leaving it to the Pope to accord the use of the chalice where the circumstances of place and person and the utility of the Church should require it. Such permission was granted in several parts of Germany, but on condition, that those permitted to receive under both kinds should acknowledge that to receive under one kind was sufficient. After some time, however, this practice, even in Germany, was abolished. (See Bossuet et P. Thomas. de Commun. sub utraq. Specie.) [See Examples of Blood issuing from Sacred Hosts, above, under FOURTEENTH MEANS, page 128.]

**6. Does one who receives but a particle of the Host, receive less than one who receives the entire Host?**

*No; because Christ cannot be divided. He is entire in each part of the Host.*

Great and most wonderful is the power of God in the creation and preservation of the world. But nowhere does his power appear more wonderful than in the mystery of the Blessed Eucharist. There he displays his almighty power, in changing the substance of his creatures, yet working this change in so miraculous a way that it is entirely hidden from the senses. He produces this change not only by his almighty word, but also by the instrumentality of even the most unworthy of his ministers. Our dear Saviour becomes present on our altars not only whole

and entire in each host, whole and entire in the chalice, but also whole and entire in each particle of the host as he is whole and entire in each drop of the species of wine. At the Last Supper, Jesus Christ did not consecrate separately each piece of bread with which he communicated his apostles: he only consecrated at once such a quantity of bread as was necessary to communicate all of them. The Gospel, speaking of the consecration of the chalice, states expressly that Christ gave it to his apostles, saying: "Take and divide this among you." (Luke xxii., 17.) So that every apostle, receiving a portion of the consecrated bread and wine, received our Lord whole and entire under each species. Hence, St. Thomas says: "Each part, however small, of the bread and wine, contains, after consecration, the body and blood, soul and divinity, of the Son of God, and produces the same spiritual effect as a larger portion; just as a small portion of the air retains the same natural properties as the whole atmosphere, or as a single drop of water has the same substance as all the waters in the immense ocean. (Compend. of St. Thomas' Theol. vol. ii. Chap. xv., by Rev. E. O'Donnell.) If the sacred host, then, is broken, or the chalice divided, it is not Christ who is broken or divided. He always remains whole and entire in each particle however small it may be. It is only the species or appearance of bread and wine which is broken or divided.

When the modern heresies in relation to the real presence were arising, our Lord was pleased to illustrate this doctrine by a miracle. A nobleman of Tyrol, named Oswald Mulser, on coming to make his Paschal Communion, insisted on being communicated with a large host. This was an act of pride and unbelief, and the priest was

induced, through human respect, to give him a large host instead of a small particle ; but, at the very moment when the host was placed on this man's tongue, the ground opened under his feet as if to swallow him alive. He had already sunk down to his knees when he seized the altar, which yielded like wax to his hands. Seeing now the vengeance of God overtaking him, he repented of his pride, and prayed for mercy. As God would not permit him to swallow the sacred host, the priest removed it and replaced it in the tabernacle. It was of the color of blood. The author, Tilman Bredenbach, who records this, says, that he himself saw the host tinged with blood, the altar bearing the impress of Oswald's hands, and the ground into which he sank still hollow, and covered with iron bars. Witnesses testify to these visible evidences of this miracle, even at the present day.

### **7. What is the effect of Holy Communion ?**

*Jesus Christ unites himself to us in the closest manner : 1, to increase sanctifying grace ; 2, to make us love virtue, and hate sin ; 3, to prepare us for a glorious resurrection and everlasting happiness.*

*In holy communion, Jesus Christ unites himself to us in the closest manner.*

In the Holy Eucharist we receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, and as members of the same family are united together by the ties of the common blood which flows in their veins, so we become truly kinsmen of Christ, by participation of the blood which he received from his most holy Mother, and which he shed on the cross for us. Hence, St. Alphonsus says, "that as the food we take is changed into our blood, so, in holy communion, God

becomes one with us ; with this difference, however, that, whereas earthly food is changed into our substance, we assume, as it were, the nature of Jesus Christ as he himself declared to St. Augustine, saying, 'It is not I that shall be changed into you, but you shall be changed into me.'” “Yes,” says St. Cyril of Alexandria, “he who communicates unites himself closely to Jesus Christ, just as two pieces of wax, when melted, become one.” And the saints have always been so penetrated with this belief that, after holy communion, they were wont to exclaim: “O Jesus ! now thou art mine and I am thine ! Thou art in me, and I in thee ! Now thou belongest entirely to me, and I belong entirely to thee. Thy soul is mine, and my soul is thine ! Thy life is mine, and my life is thine !”

But this is not all. We are united to our Lord's sacred humanity, in order that we may be made conformable to him in will and affections ; accordingly, in the Eucharist, we receive from him an immense increase of sanctifying grace, infused virtues, especially faith, hope and charity, the three distinguishing characteristics of the children of God.

First, this sacrament confers an immense increase of sanctifying grace. This grace, which was merited for us by our Lord Jesus Christ, is infused into the soul by the Holy Ghost through the sacraments ; but each sacrament does not confer it in the same manner. Baptism and Penance bestow it upon those who are entirely deprived of the grace of God, or, in other words, are spiritually dead ; Baptism being the means appointed for those who have never been in the grace of God, and Penance for those who have lost it. These sacraments are, therefore, called *Sacraments of the Dead*, being instituted for the benefit of



those who are in mortal sin, or dead to grace. When these sacraments are received with the right dispositions, they truly reconcile the sinner with God, so that, from being an enemy of God, he becomes his friend and an object of his complacency. But this acceptance, though true and real, is not the highest degree of grace; it admits of an increase, as the Holy Scripture says: "Let him that is just be justified still; and let him that is holy be sanctified still." God, therefore, appointed the other sacraments, *the Sacraments of the Living*, not only to convey special graces peculiar to each, but to impart an *increase of sanctifying grace* to those who are already in his favor. A rich man, when he has taken possession of a field which he wishes to convert into a garden, is not content with putting a wall around it, clearing it of noxious weeds and setting it in order: he continues also to cultivate it assiduously; to fill it with the most beautiful plants, and to embellish it with new and choice ornaments. Thus, Almighty God, in his love and goodness, has multiplied the means by which the soul may be enriched with the graces and merits of Jesus Christ, and become more and more agreeable and beautiful in his eyes.

Now, among all these means, there is none greater or more powerful than the Blessed Eucharist. Each time that we receive our Saviour in holy communion, we participate anew in all the merits of his Redemption: in the merits of his poverty, his hidden life, his scourging, and his crowning with thorns. The Holy Eucharist, then, differs from the other sacraments in this, that while the other sacraments bestow upon us some of the fruits of Christ's merits, this sacrament gives us the graces and merits of our Saviour in their very source. The soul, therefore, receives an immense increase of sanctifying grace at each communion.

Let us reflect upon this for a moment. It is no slight thing for a soul to be beautiful in the sight of God. That must indeed be something great and precious which can render us, sinful creatures, truly amiable before God. What must be the value of sanctifying grace which can work such a transformation? What is sanctifying grace, and who can declare its price? St. Thomas tells us that the lowest degree of sanctifying grace is worth more than all the riches of the world. Think of all the riches of this world! The mines of gold and precious stones, the forests of costly wood, and all the hidden stores of wealth, for the least of which the children of this world are willing to toil, and struggle and sin, for a whole lifetime. Now, remember that the lowest grace that an humble Catholic receives at the rails of the sanctuary, at the dawn of day, before the great world is astir, outweighs all those riches.

But, why draw comparisons from the things of this world? St. Theresa appeared, after death, to one of her sisters in religion, and told her that all the saints in heaven, without exception, would be willing to come back to this world and to remain here till the end of time, suffering all the miseries to which our mortal state is subject, only to gain one more degree of sanctifying grace and the eternal glory corresponding thereto. Nay, I will even assert that all the devils in hell would consider all the torments of their dark abode, endured for millions of millions of ages, well repaid by the least degree of that grace which they once rejected. These thoughts must give us a grand and sublime idea of the value of grace; but there is another consideration that ought to raise our estimate of God's grace still higher: it is, that God himself, the eternal Son of the Father, came down upon earth, was made man, suffered and died

the Death of the Cross in order to purchase grace for us. His life is in some way the measure of its value.

Now, this sanctifying grace is poured upon us, in holy communion, in profusion! The King of heaven is then present in our souls, scattering abundantly his benedictions, and making us taste of the treasures of the world to come. O if any one of us were to see his soul immediately after communion, how amazed and confounded would he be at the sight of it! He would take his soul for an angel.

St. Catharine of Sienna was asked by her confessor to describe the beauty of a soul as she had seen it in the state of grace. "Ah!" replied she, "the beauty and lustre of such a soul is so great, that were you to behold it, you would be willing to endure all possible pains and sufferings for its sake." Need we wonder, then, that the angels loved to associate with those saints on earth, who, every day, with great devotion, received holy communion; and that even the faces of those who were ardent lovers of the Blessed Sacrament have sometimes shone with the glory with which their souls were filled? Does not Christ say of such a soul: "How beautiful art thou, my beloved, how beautiful art thou?" "How highly, then, should we esteem this divine sacrament? At each communion, we gain more strength to conquer our passions. We become more and more united to God. We come nearer to that heavenly state in which we shall be altogether "without spot or wrinkle," holy and without blemish. Should we not, then, esteem this wonder-working sacrament more than anything else in this world. Should we not continually give thanks to God for so great a blessing, and above all, show our thankfulness by receiving it frequently and devoutly? Should we not, like the saints, sigh continually

for the moment when we can receive our Lord in the sacrament of his love?

Sweet hidden Lord, my soul is sighing,  
E'er sighing fondly but for thee!  
My waking thoughts, my dreams while sleeping,  
Are still of thee and only thee!  
Thy loved name, murmured by the stream,  
The winds breathe low as in a dream;  
The warm sun gleams, for thou art bright,  
The mild stars beam, 'tis but thy light.

O Food of Life, my faint soul hungers  
For thee, my strength, and hope and rest.  
In vain I taste earth's sweetest pleasures,  
Near thee alone my soul is blest.  
Earth's joys defile the noble heart,  
My joy, my life, dear Lord, thou art.  
Show me thy wondrous beauty rare,  
Nought else shall seem or fond or fair.

O Fount of Light, dispel my darkness,  
Let thy rays shine through earth's cold night!  
My spirit thirsts with speechless longing  
To drink thy waters calm and bright!  
Earth's lore is like the lakes that rise,  
Before the exile's weary eyes,  
'Mid glowing sands, so cool, so clear,  
They mocking gleam, then disappear!

Secondly, another benefit derived from holy communion is that we receive from Jesus Christ infused virtues, especially faith, hope and charity, as well as great love for the other virtues. As to faith, it is so much increased by communion that this sacrament may be called the *Sacrament of Faith*, not only because it requires as much faith as any mystery of our religion, but also because it increases and confirms our faith more than any other.

It seems as if God, in reward of the generous faith with which we believe this doctrine often gives an inward light, which enables the soul in some way to comprehend



it, and with it the other truths of faith. So, the Council of Trent says, "that the mode of Christ's presence in the Eucharist can hardly be expressed in words, but the pious mind, illuminated by faith, can conceive it." The reception of this sacrament is the best explanation of the difficulties which the senses oppose to it. It was at the *breaking of bread* at Emmaus that the two disciples recognized Jesus. He himself gives us clear evidence of the reality of the divine presence in this heavenly food, and makes us *taste* what we do not understand. One day, a holy soul said to Father Surin, of the Society of Jesus: "I would not exchange a single one of the divine communications which I receive in holy communion, for all that men or angels might present to me."

Sometimes God adds to these favors the gift of spiritual joy and delight, intense and indescribable. St. Thomas says, "that holy communion is a spiritual eating, which communicates an actual delight to such souls as receive it devoutly and with due preparation." And the effect of this delight, according to St. Cyprian, is, that it detaches the heart from all worldly pleasures, and makes it die to everything perishable. Nay, this joy is sometimes even communicated to the exterior senses, penetrating them with a sweetness so great that nothing in the world can be compared to it. St. Francis, St. Monica, St. Agnes and many others bear witness to this. Intoxicated with celestial sweetness in holy communion, these pure souls exulted with joy and exclaimed with the Psalmist: "My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God. For what have I in heaven? and, besides thee, what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, the God that is my portion forever. My Jesus, my love, my God, my all." O what

a firm faith men would have in this mystery did they communicate often and devoutly ! One single communion is better than all the arguments of the schools. We have not a lively faith, we think little of heaven, of hell, of the evils of sin, the goodness of our Lord, and the duty of loving him, because we stay away from communion. Let us eat, and our eyes shall be opened. "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet."

*Hope*, also, receives a great increase from this sacrament, for it is the pledge of our inheritance and has in itself the promise of eternal life. "He that eateth of this bread shall live forever. He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood abideth in me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father, so he that eateth me the same also shall live by me. He shall never hunger or thirst. He shall not die, but have life everlasting, and I will raise him up, on the last day." (St. John, chap. vi., 58.) St. Paul argues that "if we are sons, then we are heirs, heirs indeed of God, and joint heirs with Christ:" and elsewhere he says, "that we glory in hope of the glory of God." It is true, that in this life we can never have an infallible assurance of our salvation, but holy communion most powerfully confirms and strengthens our hope of obtaining heaven and the graces necessary for living and dying holily. However great the fear and diffidence may be with which our sins inspire us what soul is not comforted when our Saviour himself enters the heart and seems to say : "Ask whatever you will, and it shall be done unto you." "Can I refuse the less—I who have given the greater ? Can I withhold any necessary graces who have given myself ? Shall I refuse to bring you to reign with me in heaven, who am come down on earth to dwell with you ?"

Charity, however, is the virtue which is more especially nourished by the Holy Eucharist. This may even be called the proper effect of this sacrament, as indeed it is the effect of the Incarnation itself. "I am come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled!" (St. Luke xii., 49.) St. Dionysius the Areopagite, says that "Jesus Christ in the most Holy Eucharist is a fire of charity." It cannot be otherwise. As a burning house sets the adjacent ones on fire, so the heart of Jesus which is always burning with love, communicates the flames of charity to those who receive him in holy communion. Jesus Christ says: "He that eateth me shall live by me—he abideth in me and I in him." (John vi., 57, 58.) And, in another place, he says: "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." (John xv., 5.) Indeed he bears the admirable fruit of divine charity. Charity is a filial love of God. Religion makes us worship God as our Creator; fear makes us serve him as our Judge; hope makes us wish for him as our great recompense, but charity makes us love him as our Father. A man without charity is deprived of the character of a child of God; he is a slave, a hireling. He will have no share in the inheritance of the children of God. He does not belong to the family; he knows nothing of its enjoyments: he is a heathen. But how can we, poor, miserable creatures conceive this filial love of God and make it grow in our hearts? Listen to the great means: God has one only Son. This Son loves his heavenly Father with the most perfect filial love. By the Incarnation this Son has become the Son of man, and by the Eucharist he becomes the daily food of the Christian and the life of his heart. It is therefore from this intimate union with the Son of God, in holy communion,

that we draw the affectionate sentiments, the tender love, the true devotedness, the intimate confidence, the reverential familiarity of a son towards his father.

Holy communion is the soul of charity and true piety, the source of devotion, the centre of the Christian religion, the sun of all spiritual exercises. The Christian religion has caused a revolution in the soul. Fear has given way to love. Since Almighty God has humbled himself so far as to become our brother, our servant, man has been raised to a kind of familiarity with the Almighty—a familiarity of which the ancients had not even the remotest idea, and which would have seemed to them the height of presumption and irreverence. This sentiment is the salient, the characteristic feature of Christian nations. If, indeed, our sentiments of charity and piety widely differ from those of non-Catholics, the cause of this difference must be sought in our greater familiarity with Jesus Christ—a familiarity which is the result of our faith in the real presence. It is not merely to mankind in general, it is to each Christian that Christ unites himself. Now, by uniting himself to our souls in holy communion, he makes us divine. Who can fail to see that a religion founded on such a mystery, must develop, to the highest degree, that sentiment of charity and familiarity with God, which is the foundation and the heart of Christianity? In our admirable prayers for communion the soul speaks to Jesus as the bride to her bridegroom.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, St. Catharine of Sienna, St. Theresa, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis Xavier, and thousands of others, by their frequent communions, became, as it were, furnaces of divine love. “Do you not feel,” said St. Vincent of Paul to his brethren in religion



“do you not become sensible of the divine fire in your hearts, after having received the adorable body of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist?” In proof of the strength of love which souls derive from holy communion, I might appeal to the ecstasies and raptures which so many souls have experienced at the reception of the most Holy Eucharist. What were all these favors but flames of divine love, enkindled by this heavenly fire which, as it were, destroyed in them every thing earthly, and conformed them to the image of their Saviour. Or, I might appeal to those sweet tears which flow from the eyes of so many servants of God, when they receive the bread of heaven. But I have a better proof than these transports of devotion: I mean suffering. This is the true test of love. St. Paul says that the Christian glories in tribulation, because the charity of God is poured out into his heart; and so the Holy Eucharist, by infusing love into our hearts, gives us strength to suffer for Christ.

In the life of St. Lidwina, who was sick for thirty-eight years, we read that, in the beginning of her sickness, she shrunk from suffering. By a particular disposition of Providence, however, a celebrated servant of God, John Por, went to see her, and, perceiving that she was not quite resigned to the will of God, he exhorted her to meditate frequently on the sufferings of Jesus Christ, that by the remembrance of his Passion she might be able to suffer more willingly. She promised to do so, and fulfilled her promise, but she could not find any relief for her soul. Every meditation was disgusting and unpleasant, and she began again to break out into her usual complaints. After a while, her director returned and asked her how she had succeeded in meditating upon our Lord's Passion, and what profit she had derived from it. “O my Father,” she

answered, "your counsel was very good indeed, but the greatness of my suffering does not allow me to find any consolation in meditating on my Saviour's sorrows. He exhorted her for some time to continue this exercise, no matter how insipid it might be to her; but, perceiving at last, that she drew no fruit from it, his zeal suggested another means. He gave her holy communion, and afterwards whispered in her ear: "Till now I have exhorted you to the continual remembrance of Christ's sufferings as a remedy for your pains, now let Jesus himself exhort you." Behold! no sooner had she received the sacred host than she felt so great a love for Jesus, and so ardent a desire to become like unto him in his sufferings, that she broke out into sobs and sighs, and for two weeks was hardly able to stop her tears. From that moment the pains and sufferings of her Saviour remained so deeply impressed upon her mind that she thought of them continually, and was thus enabled to suffer patiently for him, who for the love of her, had endured so many and so great torments. Her disease at last grew so violent that her flesh began to corrupt and to be filled with worms; the putrefaction extended even internally, so that she had to suffer the most excruciating pains. But, comforted by the example of Jesus Christ, she not only praised God and gave thanks to him for all her sufferings, but even vehemently desired to suffer still more; nay, by meditating on the Passion of Christ, she was so much inflamed with love that she used to say, "it was not she who suffered, but her Lord Jesus who suffered in her." (Surius, 14 April, in *vita S. Lidwinæ*, part i., c. 14.)

Thus, by holy communion, this saint received a grace by which she has merited to be numbered among the most.

patient of saints. Nor is this a single case. Animated by this heavenly food, St. Lawrence braved the flames, St. Vincent the rack, St. Sebastian the shower of arrows, St. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, the fury of lions, and many other martyrs every kind of torture which the malice of the devil could invent, content if they could but return their Saviour love for love, life for life, death for death. They embraced the very instruments of their tortures; yea, they even exulted and gloried in them. Now all this was the effect of the Holy Eucharist; this life-giving bread imparted to them courage and joy in every pain and trial. For this very reason, in the early times of persecution, all Christians, in order to be prepared for martyrdom, received the Blessed Sacrament every day, and when the danger was too pressing for them to assemble together, they even carried the sacred host to their homes, that they might communicate themselves early in the morning. (The same was done by Mary Queen of Scots, during her captivity in England, when she was deprived of the ministry of the priest.) It was for this same reason that Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist just before his Passion, that he might thereby fortify his apostles for the trials that were coming on them.

This divine charity produces also that virtue, called sacerdotal chastity and religious virginity: a virtue unknown wherever the sacrifice of Jesus Christ—holy Mass—and communion are unknown. This angelic virtue is the fruit of charity—a virtue which regulates our duties towards ourselves, and which the apostle calls temperance.

This Christian virtue of temperance excludes all that is irregular in our desires, moderates the use even of those enjoyments which are lawful, and tends to destroy in us every disorderly affection. Jesus Christ has declared war

against our corrupt flesh and blood, and has expressly excluded them from the kingdom of heaven. He reserves that heavenly royalty for those only who know how to do violence to themselves; who know how to sacrifice themselves, to bear their daily cross, and to follow him in the path of privation and suffering. He blesses marriage when restored to its original laws of unity and indissolubility, though virginity is, in his eyes, a far more perfect state. By word and example he recommends the virtue of abstinence and fasting. In short, he wishes his mystical members to become conformable to their head crowned with thorns, to feet and hands pierced with nails, to a tongue moistened with vinegar and gall, to a heart pierced with the lance. But, how is all this possible? It becomes possible when Jesus Christ, the new Adam, comes frequently to us in holy communion to purify our flesh by contact with his sacred flesh, and to diffuse through our veins his own pure and generous blood. It is realized when the Son of Mary comes to combat and neutralize in us the deadly influence of the blood of Adam, when he inebriates us with that "wine which makes virgins to spring forth." (Zach. ix., 27.) We shall become angels if we are fed with the bread of angels. We shall not regret the pleasures of the world when we have been filled with the manna of heaven. After having feasted at the table of God, we shall not care to sit down at the table of devils. He, however, who neglects the Holy Eucharist, will also neglect abstinence, fasting, the indissolubility of the conjugal tie, the devotedness of virginity and religious poverty, the practices of mortification, and in general all the holy austerity of the Gospel. Without the Blessed Eucharist, the Church of Jesus Christ would not be more pure than the Jewish



synagogue, our holiness would not surpass that of the Scribes and Pharisees. Our Lord has said that what is born of the flesh is flesh . . . and that we "do not gather grapes from thorns." (John iii., 6., and Matt. vii., 16.) But our faith in the real presence, and our devotion to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, our frequent reception of his body and blood in holy communion, enable us to observe the whole of the Christian law. You ask how the Blessed Sacrament enables us to keep the commandments, and thus preserve ourselves from mortal sin. I answer: In two ways—by weakening our passions, and by protecting us against the assaults of the devil.

As the body is continually in danger of death, by reason of the law of decay which works unceasingly within us, so also is the life of the soul constantly in jeopardy from that fearful proneness to sin which is inherent in our fallen nature. Now, this proneness to sin is greatly increased by our passions and by the temptations of the devil. Hence, as Almighty God, in his wisdom, has given us natural food as the means of repairing the decay of the body and of warding off death, so has he seen fit to give us spiritual and heavenly food to keep us from falling into mortal sin, which causes the death of the soul. This food is the Holy Eucharist. The Council of Trent says that the sacrament of the Eucharist is "the antidote by which we are freed from daily faults and preserved from mortal sins." Hence, St. Francis de Sales compares holy communion to the Tree of Life which grew in the midst of the Garden of Paradise. "Just as our first parents," he says, "by eating of the Tree of Life could have warded off the death of the body, so we, by feeding on this Sacrament of Life, can ward off the death of the soul."

Every one has some besetting sin, some passion which is excited in his heart more easily and more frequently than others, and which is the cause of the greater part of his faults. In some, it is anger; in others, envy; in others, pride; in others, sensuality and impurity. Now, however weak one may be, and by whatsoever passion he may be agitated, let him frequently receive the body of Christ, and his soul will become tranquil and strong. The saints were wont to express this by saying that, as the waters of the Jordan stood back when the ark of the covenant approached, so our passions and evil inclinations are repelled when Jesus Christ enters into our hearts in holy communion. St. Bernard says: "If we do not experience so frequent and violent attacks of anger, envy and concupiscence as formerly, let us give thanks to Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament who has produced these effects in us." In the form of thanksgiving which the Church recommends to be used by the priest after Mass, there is a prayer for imploring God that, just as the holy martyr St. Lawrence overcame the torments of fire, so the soul, which has been fed with this bread of heaven, may be enabled to extinguish the flames of concupiscence. There are thousands of instances which attest the efficacy of the Blessed Sacrament in this respect.

In Ferrara, there lived a man who, in his youth, was very much molested with temptations of the flesh to which he very often gave consent, and thus committed many mortal sins. To free himself from this wretched state he determined to marry; but his wife died very soon and he was again in danger. He was not disposed to marry again; yet, to remain a widower was, he thought, to expose himself anew to his former temptations. In this emergency he

consulted a good friend and received the advice to go frequently to confession and holy communion. He followed this advice, and soon experienced such extraordinary effects of the sacrament that he could not help exclaiming: "O, why did I not sooner meet with such a friend! Most certainly I would not have committed so many abominable sins of impurity had I more frequently received this sacrament which *maketh virgins.*" (Baldesanus in Stim. Virt. i., c. 8.)

In the life of St. Philip Neri, we read that one day a young man, who was leading a very impure life, came to him to confession. St. Philip, knowing that there was no better remedy against concupiscence than the most sacred body of Jesus Christ, counselled him to frequent the sacraments. By this means he was, in a short time, entirely freed from his vicious habits and became pure as an angel.

Monseigneur De Ségur says, in his little treatise on weekly communion, "I know one who, after devoting forty years to the work of sanctifying youths, said to me: 'I have a very simple and almost infallible method of knowing at once the moral condition of any establishment for boys—college, boarding-school, seminary, academy, etc. Do the boys communicate frequently? If they do, all is well; if they do not, I have my doubts. This test I have found out, after long experience, and I do not remember that I have ever been deceived by it.'" "In a fine large school in the South," said a holy religious to me, (Mons. De Ségur,) 'I have had the happiness of preaching the annual retreat once or twice. It was wonderful to see how everything seemed redolent with the perfume of the Holy Eucharist. The spiritual direction of the youths was based on the largest views and the most consummate prudence. There were hardly two of them who remained

proof against its piety and love. The morals of the place were perfect, the discipline excellent, and its learning on a level with its fervor.

“Alas, a new superior came, who thought it right to check this zeal for communion, under pretext of discipline and regularity. He restricted the privileges of frequent confession, and still more that of frequent communion. In less than two years the tone of the house had completely altered, and cheerfulness and good morals had disappeared, together with pious devotion. And this religious house, formerly so edifying, never became again what it had been.

“The venerable superior of an important *petit seminaire*, where the privilege of frequent communion had existed for some five or six years, said to me, in confidence, at the end of a retreat, ‘I become more and more convinced, not only of the utility, but I must say of the necessity, of frequent communion in houses of education, particularly bishops’ schools. In a few years’ time this place has been transformed. Hardly any surveillance is necessary, even over the smallest boys : *our Lord in the Eucharist manages all for us in the recesses of their hearts*. We are every day at the children’s disposal ; they confess whenever they wish, and to the confessor they prefer. They have full liberty to approach the holy table whenever they like, and there is hardly one who does not receive his divine Saviour every Sunday and feast-day. The heads of the classes set the good example. Our best scholars are almost always the most fervent. Everything goes like clock-work. It is really a house where God is served.’

“‘And the man,’ he added, ‘who would teach this lesson to the superiors of our seminaries and religious schools,



would deserve to be called the Saviour of our young ecclesiastical students, and indeed of our Catholic youth in general.'

"As it is with the life of the individual so it is with the life of the Christian family. Frequent communion sanctifies the family by sanctifying each member thereof. What is it that generally mars the happiness of a family? Is it not nearly always ill-temper on the part of the father, the mother, or the children? At the slightest contradiction they are offended; they get angry, they wound the feelings of others, they become violent, and are very difficult to appease. There is no yielding.

"Now in a family, in which nearly all the members are in the pious habit of receiving communion frequently, or at least once a week, such outbursts of bad temper are, generally, if not always, repressed. And why? Because conscience is necessarily on the alert, being kept ever watchful by the salutary effects of holy communion. Every time they receive communion, father, mother, children and servants renew their good resolutions and draw from this holy sacrament the strength necessary to remain faithful. I do not pretend to say that bad tempers and other natural defects are uprooted by frequent communion, but they are carefully controlled, and successfully combated by means of this great sacrament. On the contrary, in a family, where the members receive communion only once or twice a year, all natural defects have full play. Instead of being combated, they are allowed to gain strength during the five or six months that intervene between each communion. As no care is taken to renew often and regularly a stock of meekness, forbearance, charity, and self-denial, it is impossible for the members of such a family to overcome

themselves and to practise those domestic virtues which are the soul of happiness and union.

“What has been said of the wonderful effects of frequent communion upon the Christian family applies also to the parish. O what a change for the better would soon take place if all the faithful of a parish were often to receive holy communion !

“Abuses of every kind would disappear in a short time, simply through the workings of conscience. There would be no more dishonesty, scarcely any quarrels, no real scandals. All might not indeed become perfect, but all would immediately improve, and improve so much that, compared with their former state, they would seem almost perfect. The work of police, magistrates, and of half the judges would be almost superfluous. There would be no more law-suits or disputes ; peace, union and sweet cheerfulness would reign everywhere. There would be no more poor, for the rich would be always ready to provide for their wants. In a word, there would be no evils except those necessarily entailed by human frailty. And how well God would be served ! How pleasant would then be the life of a priest ! The priest’s work will always remain hard, but nevertheless what consolations would he then have ! Even if he were worked to death, what a holy and glorious death it would be ! And then what a consoling sight would the churches present, especially on Sundays and holidays ! What congregations ! How every one’s fervor would be maintained by the example of his fellows ! It would be a heaven on earth.

“I am not writing simply from fancy. There are parishes in the world of this kind. I saw such some time back ; in Tyrol, for instance, in the isle of Malta, and

again in certain parts of the Pontifical States. During a tour I made with some friends in Tyrol, in 1846, the pastor of one of those happy places told me that *every day nearly all* his parishioners assisted at Mass before dawn—the men on one side, the women on the other; that every night they recited the Rosary and family prayers, together; and that from the time of their First Communion every one, not hindered from doing so, approached the sacraments regularly every Sunday and feast-day. We started on our journey at five o'clock in the morning, and passed before the church; it was crowded; so crowded, indeed, that some thirty people were kneeling on the ground, hearing Mass outside the church. We passed close by them on horseback, and not one turned his head to look at us.

“At a place eleven leagues from Rome, in 1853, I saw something similar. ‘We have not a beggar in the parish,’ said the *gonfaloniere*, or mayor. ‘Monks or nuns take care of our poor. One old constable is enough to keep peace all over town, though it has six thousand inhabitants. Our families are large, industrious and happy. And the good religious who help the parish priests to nourish the piety of these excellent people, added: ‘Here, the majority of our congregations approach the sacraments weekly or fortnightly; no one stays away longer than a month. Herein lay the secret of their peace and happiness.

“I knew, in Normandy, an admirable priest, still living, to whom was intrusted a newly-formed parish, where everything had to be done. This parish consisted of five hundred souls taken from three neglected adjacent parishes, scarcely twenty of whom had made their Easter. The pastor set to work—was his own mason, carpenter, and collector of funds—and in six years he built a pretty little

church with a well arranged sacristy. He also founded an excellent school, taught by Franciscan nuns, where all his little ones learned how to lead good lives and save their souls. Last of all, he built a presbytery, after years of inconceivable difficulties. All the while he was regularly and carefully giving catechetical instructions ; indefatigable in preaching very short, simple, and practical sermons ; ardently exhorting his flock to worship the providence of God, and to confess and communicate very frequently. He so arranged the hours of Mass that all could conveniently receive the sacraments ; he taught them how to derive most profit from confession and the Holy Eucharist, and made his church an attraction and a pleasure to them. At the end of the first six years this good priest had, every day, from forty to sixty pious attendants at Mass, and ten to fifteen communicants ; and every Sunday fifty or sixty communicants, sometimes a hundred ; every month the greater part of his parishioners, men and women, youths and maidens, came to his side to gain new graces and strengthen their good resolutions. The change was complete. Instead of the old *twenty* Easter communions of former days, there were now thousands of communions in the course of the year ; some chosen souls communicated every morning ; and at the time that he was telling me of these miraculous transformations, there remained only sixteen persons in the parish to convert."

Ask any Christian who once lived in sin and afterwards truly amended, when was it that he began to get the better of his passions, and he will tell you it was, from the moment that he began to frequent the sacraments. How can it be otherwise ? Jesus calms the winds and seas by a single word. What storm will be able to resist his power ? What



gust of passion will not subside when, on entering the soul, he says: "Peace be with thee: be not afraid, it is I!"

Multitudes of pious souls confess that it is holy communion alone which keeps them steady in the practice of virtue, and cheerful amid all the vicissitudes of life.

How often do we hear such souls declaring that on the days on which they do not receive communion they seem to be paralyzed. Everything seems to go wrong with them, and all their crosses seem tenfold heavier than usual. But when, in the morning, they have had the happiness of partaking of the body of Christ, everything seems to go well with them. The daily annoyances of life seem to disappear; they are happy and joyous. Words of kindness seem to come naturally to their lips, and life is no longer the burden which it once seemed to be. The danger of mortal sin, however, arises not only from the strength of our passions, but also from the violence of the temptations with which the devil assails us; and against these, too, the Blessed Sacrament protects us.

When Ramirus, king of Spain, had been fighting a long time against the Saracens, he retired with his soldiers to a mountain to implore the assistance of Almighty God. Whilst at prayer, St. James the apostle appeared to him and commanded him to make all his soldiers go to confession and communion the day following, and then to lead them out against their enemies. After the soldiers had done what the saint had commanded them, they had an engagement with the Saracens, and gained a complete and brilliant victory. (Chron. Gen. Alphon. Reg.)

How much more, in our conflict with the devil, shall we be enabled, by means of holy communion, to put him to flight and cover him with shame and confusion! St. Thomas

says: "Hell was subdued by the death of our Saviour, and the Blessed Sacrament of the altar being a mystical renewal of the death of Jesus Christ, the devils no sooner behold his body and blood in us, than they immediately take flight, giving place to the angels who draw nigh and assist us." St. John Chrysostom says: "As the Angel of Destruction passed by all the houses of the Israelites, without doing them any harm, because he found the door-posts sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, so the devil passes by us when he beholds within us the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God." And St. Ambrose says: "When thy adversary sees thy habitation filled with the brightness of the presence of God, he flies away, perceiving that no room is left for his temptations.

O how often have souls been so dreadfully tormented by the evil representations, and suggestions of the devil, as not to know what to do! But, no sooner had they received holy communion than they became at once calm and peaceful! Read the lives of the saints, and you will find many instances of this; or ask any devout Catholic, and he will tell you that what I assert is really true. Nay, the devil himself has often confessed this truth. If he were forced to declare why it is that he cannot tempt such and such a soul oftener and more violently, why it is that he is forced to withdraw so often from a soul which once he held in his power, what do you think he would answer? Hear what he answered, on a certain occasion.

A person whom, by a special permission of God, the devil was allowed to harass very much, and even drag about on the ground, was exorcised by a priest of our Congregation, and the devil was commanded to say whether or not holy communion was very useful and profitable to the soul. At

the first and second interrogatory the evil spirit would not answer, but the third time, being commanded in the name of the blessed Trinity, he replied with a wild shriek : "Profitable ! Know that if this person had not received holy communion so many times, we should have had her completely in our power." Behold, then, our great weapon against the devil ! "Yes," says the great St. John Chrysostom, "after receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist, we become as terrible to the devil as a furious lion is to man."

When the King of Syria sent his soldiers to take the prophet Eliseus captive, the servant of the prophet was very much afraid at seeing the great army and the horses and chariots. "Alas !" he cried, "alas ! alas ! my Lord, what shall we do ?" But the prophet said : "Fear not ; for there are more with us than with them ;" and then he showed the trembling servant how the whole mountain was covered with angels ready to defend them. So, however weak we may be, and however powerful our enemies, fortified with the bread of heaven, we have no reason to fear : we are stronger than hell, for God is with us. "The Lord ruleth me, I shall want nothing. Though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I fear no evils, for thou art with me. Thou hast prepared a *table* before me against them that afflict me."

"O Philothea," says St. Francis de Sales, "what reply will reprobate Christians be able to make to the reproaches of the just Judge, for having lost his grace when it was so easy to have preserved it ?" If the means of avoiding sin had been very difficult of access, the case of the reprobate might seem hard ; but who can pity him who has but to obey the easy command : "Take and eat ; if any man shall

eat of this bread he shall live forever." For a Catholic to fall into mortal sin is as if one should starve at a splendid banquet; and for a Christian to die in the power of the devil, is indeed to be in love with death.

"The counsel of counsels, then," says Bishop De Ségur, "which I would give to a priest, to enable him to make his penitents truly pious; the advice I would give to a superior of a seminary, to enable him to make his students virtuous; the counsel I would give to a father of a family to enable him to live in harmony with his wife; and to a married woman, to enable her to support the faults of her husband; the advice I would give to parents, to enable them to give a good education to their children; and to children, that they may be good and happy at home and love one another; finally, the advice I would give to masters and servants, to help them to fulfil easily their duties to each other,—is, simply, to have recourse, often and regularly, to holy communion. To the Christian family, as well as to each Christian in particular, our Saviour says: 'Come to me, all, and I will refresh you, console you and sanctify you!'"

*Thirdly, holy communion prepares us for a glorious resurrection and everlasting happiness.*

By sin, our body has been doomed to death and corruption; but by eating the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ, the seed of immortality is implanted in us. Our flesh and blood mingling with the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ in holy communion, are fitted for a glorious resurrection. Leaven or yeast when mixed with dough, soon penetrates the entire mass and imparts new qualities thereto. In like manner, the glorified body of Jesus Christ penetrates



our entire being and endows it with new qualities, the qualities of glory and immortality. Our divine Saviour himself assures us of this: "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood," says he, "abideth in me and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, the same also shall live by me, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John vi., 55, 57.) Indeed, how can we, nourished by him who is the *Resurrection and the Life* and who gives eternal life to the guests at his table, how can we be eternally the prey of death? Earthly food can maintain only our mortal life; but Jesus Christ, the eternal Life itself, who becomes our food will not suffer us to remain the slaves of death forever. We may then sleep tranquilly that sleep of death, which, in Christian language, is called our new birth. That slumber will be short, and soon will he who raised Lazarus, who arose himself out of the grave, and who has given us to eat the Resurrection and the Life,—soon will he awaken us, to clothe us with his glory, and to associate us with himself in his everlasting kingdom.

Spring's fairest flow'rs I've seen around me dying,

The bright stars shine then disappear;

Sweet music charms awhile then sadly sighing,

It faints upon the ravished ear.

Hush! weary heart! cease to murmur and sigh,

O'er the dark tomb are pure joys that ne'er die.

What though this earth be doomed to pain and sadness,

It's loveliness but gild the tomb?

Exult, sad soul, sing hymns of praise and gladness,

On high thy deathless life shall bloom.

Sorrow and pain here below may be thine,

Glorious, immortal, in heaven thou'lt shine.

Ay! let this clay return to whence 'twas taken,

My soul shall ever live and love;

The stars may fall, the rock-ribbed earth be shaken,

My soul shall reign in heaven above.  
Ashes to ashes, and earth unto earth ;  
Soul, thou shalt sing over nature's new birth.

And e'en this clay shall not be doomed forever  
To darkness drear and mouldering grave ;  
What God's pure flesh has sanctified shall never  
Remain death's lifeless, hopeless slave !  
E'en this frail body shall rise, bright and fair,  
And shine, like the glad sun, in glory fore'er.

O truly wonder-working sacrament ! Marvellous invention of divine love ! surpassing all power of speech to describe, or of thought to fathom ! When the children of Israel found in the fields the bread from heaven which God gave them in the wilderness, they called it "*Manhu, i. e.,* What is it ?" because they did not know what it was. So, after all that we have said of the true Manna, the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, we must confess that we are unable to comprehend it. "*Man does not live on bread alone.*" He has a higher life than that which is nourished by the fruits of the earth : a spiritual, a divine life, and this life is nourished by the body of Christ. Hidden under the sacramental form, our divine Saviour dwells near us to make us more and more acceptable to him ; to preserve us, in this wicked world, from mortal sin ; to make us true children of God ; to console us in our exile ; to give us a pledge of our eternal happiness ; to inflame our hearts with the love of God. And, as if all this were not enough, as if to set the seal on all he has done for us, he is sometimes pleased to make his own most sacred body supply the place of all other nourishment, and to sustain miraculously even the natural life of his servants. St. Catharine of Sienna, from Ash-Wednesday to Ascension-day, took no other food than holy communion. (Surius, 29 April.) A certain

holy virgin of Rome spent five whole lents without tasting anything but the bread of angels. (Cacciaguerra.)

Nicholas de la Flue, for fifteen successive years, lived without other nourishment than the sacred body of our Lord. (Simon Majolus Canicular. Collet IV.) And St. Liberalis, bishop of Athens, fasted every day in the week, taking nothing whatever, not even the Blessed Sacrament, and, on Sunday, his only nourishment consisted in this heavenly food, yet he was always strong and vigorous. (P. Nat. L. IV., Collat. Sanct. c. xciii.) We can but repeat, O wonder-working sacrament, we are at a loss what to say! We are silenced by the greatness of God's bounty. What can we do but humbly thank God in the depths of our hearts for so great a blessing, so rich a consolation in this valley of tears. There is nothing, short of the vision of God in heaven, which the mind of man can conceive, so precious as holy communion. "Thou hast given us, O Lord, bread from heaven, having in it all manner of delights!" "O sacred banquet in which Christ is received, the memory of his passion is celebrated, the mind is filled with grace, and the pledge of future glory is given to us! Alleluia!"

#### **8. What sin is committed by those who receive Holy Communion in a state of mortal sin?**

*They commit the sin of sacrilege, making themselves guilty of the body and blood of our Lord. (1 Cor. xi., 27-29.)*

The subject of unworthy communion is by no means as agreeable as those questions with which we have been hitherto engaged; but reverence for our divine Saviour, as well as zeal for the salvation of souls, requires that the truth should be told. There is nothing that gives more

honor to God, and contributes more to our own welfare, than the devout reception of the Holy Eucharist ; and there is, on the contrary, nothing more injurious to God and more hurtful to our souls, than an unworthy communion. You will, perhaps, ask in astonishment : “ Are there, then, really, people so wicked as knowingly and wilfully to make an unworthy communion ? ” Alas ! that I must say it, there are but too many. I do not mean to say that there are many who receive the sacrament unworthily *out of pure malice*, with the express purpose of dishonoring God—though, even that has happened—but I do say, that there are many who wish to enjoy the privileges of a Christian whilst leading an immoral life, and who dare receive the Author of all purity into a heart that is defiled by mortal sin. This crime of sacrilege is committed by three classes of persons : first, by all those who are in mortal sin, and who go to communion after having been refused absolution ; secondly, by all those who have wilfully concealed a mortal sin in confession ; and, finally, by those who, though they have confessed all their mortal sins, have, nevertheless, no true sorrow for them and no firm purpose of amendment. To the latter class belong all those that do not intend to keep the promises they made in confession ; who are not willing to be reconciled to those who have offended them ; those who will not restore the property or good name of their neighbor ; those who are not fully determined to keep away from those bar-rooms, gambling-saloons and other infamous places that have often proved occasions of sin to them ; and, finally, all those that will not break off sinful and dangerous company. Now, if we consider the actual state of the world, we cannot help fearing that there are many who make bad communions. The Catholic priest, there-



fore, is in duty bound to warn the faithful against this grievous crime. Even in the very first ages of Christianity, in those days of primitive fervor, St. Paul was compelled to warn the Christians of Corinth against this heinous crime, and the few energetic words he addressed to them, on that occasion, comprehend all that may be said on the subject. "Whosoever," he says, "shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." And again: "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." We will follow the apostle, both in the choice of arguments and the order of presenting them. We will consider, in the first place, the heinousness of the *crime* which they commit who receive communion sacrilegiously, and, in the second place, the terrible chastisement that await those guilty creatures.

St. Paul paints this crime in the most fearful colors. "Whosoever," he says, "shall eat this bread or drink the chalice of the Lord unworthily, *shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*" By this he evidently asserts that whoever receives the Blessed Eucharist unworthily is, in a certain sense, guilty of the murder of our Lord. This may, at first sight, appear extravagant. It may seem harsh to class the sacrilegious communicant with the enemies of our Lord—with those wicked men who put him to death; but a little reflection will show how closely he resembles them. While our blessed Lord was yet living on earth, he had many cruel enemies. There were, however, *three* that persecuted him with special malice. They were Herod, Judas, and the Jewish priests and people. In Herod, we see cruel violence towards an innocent and unoffending Babe; in Judas, we see base treachery and

ingratitude to a Friend and Benefactor ; and, in the Jewish priests, we behold outrage, insolence and contempt of the anointed Messiah, the true Son of God. Now we shall find all these crimes united in each sacrilegious communion. “Go,” said Herod to the Wise Men ; “go and search diligently after the Child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I also may come and adore him.” These words seem full of faith and reverence ; but, under this outward show of reverence, Herod concealed a wicked and cruel design. He was determined to destroy the new-born King of the Jews, and when he found that he had been disappointed, he slew, in his fury, all the children of Bethlehem and the neighborhood thereof. He did not, however, succeed in destroying the divine Infant. St. Joseph, in obedience to the command of God, carried the divine Babe into Egypt. There he remained until the angel of the Lord appeared again to St. Joseph, and said : “Take the Child and his Mother, and return to thy country, for those that sought the life of the Child are dead.” O angel of God ! what dost thou say ? They are dead who sought the life of the Child ? Ah ! would that it were true ! Are not those wicked Christians who outrage their Saviour in the true Bethlehem, *the house of bread*, that is to say, at the very foot of the sacred altar, are they not so many Herods ? They present themselves at the table of the Lord in the attitude of adoration ; they strike their breasts, as if in sorrow for their sins ; they fold their hands, as if in deep devotion ; they open those lips defiled by sin ; they receive the innocent Lamb of God and make him a prisoner in a sinful and polluted heart. Mortal sin is so opposed to God that, if he could die, sin would destroy him. To receive our Lord into a heart that is defiled by mortal sin is to

bring him into the power of his greatest enemy—it is to treat him with even greater cruelty than Herod. Herod was an unbelieving Jew ; but those who receive Jesus unworthily in holy communion are Christians and Catholics. They know whom they maltreat ; Herod did not know him. Our Lord does not work a miracle to deliver himself out of the hands of such wicked Christians, as he did to free himself from the hands of Herod ; he does not send an angel to inform the priest who, among the throng that presses to the altar, are in the state of mortal sin ; and even if he were to do so, the priest is not at liberty to make use of this knowledge ; at least, not unless the criminal should be a notorious sinner ; so tender is Jesus of the reputation of those very men who are heaping outrages upon him. He does *not* desert the consecrated species the moment he is laid upon the tongue of the sacrilegious communicant. No ! true to his own loving institution, he remains and enters unresistingly even the basest heart. O what must be his feelings at such a moment ? When Jesus was struck by that infamous servant in the judgment-hall, he said : “ If I have spoken ill, give testimony of the evil ; but if well, why strikest thou me ? ” It is thus, too, that Jesus seems to address the unworthy communicant : “ What have I done,” he says, “ O Christian soul, that thou shouldst treat me so cruelly ? Was it not enough that I had to flee from the rage of tyrants when I was on earth : wilt thou, too, lift up thy hand against me ? Ah ! from them I fled, but from thee I cannot flee. Strike, then ; I will not avoid the blow. Strike ! it shall fall upon my heart, for my love has bound my hands. I do not resist.” In the early ages of the Church, distorted accounts of the Eucharistic sacrifice reached the ears of the heathens, and

they accused the Christians of the horrid custom of murdering, in their assemblies, an infant whom they adored as their God. This was a base calumny; but, alas! the accusation is but too true of those wicked monsters who are guilty of an unworthy communion!

Yes, the unworthy communicant is another Herod; but he is even worse, he is a second *Judas*. All men abhor Judas Iscariot; his very name is held in execration. No Christian would bear the name of Judas. The Church seems unwilling to pronounce it, even when belonging to another apostle. In the canon of the Mass, when the names of the twelve apostles occur, she designates the apostle who was named *Judas Thaddeus* simply as *Thaddeus*, omitting the title which he shared in common with the apostate traitor. Now, whence comes this deep, this universal detestation of Judas? What crime has he committed to make him thus an object of horror to all men? Ah! you know it already. Judas was a traitor! He was guilty of the blackest ingratitude, the basest treachery. He professed to be the friend of Jesus; he had received innumerable benefits from our dear Lord; he had been treated as an intimate friend, and he used the knowledge which this intimacy gave him, to betray his Master into the hands of his enemies. He came into the garden where our Lord was praying with his disciples—he gave him a kiss, the usual salutation between Jesus and his apostles, and said: “Hail, Rabbi!” Immediately the armed multitude which Judas had brought with him seized our Lord, bound him, and carried him captive to the palace of the high-priest. How touching is the reproach which Christ then made to Judas: “Ah Judas! dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?” Our Lord seems to feel the



circumstances of his betrayal even more than the betrayal itself. If it had been any one but Judas, who was one of the apostles, one whom Jesus had chosen to be a priest and prince of his Church; one whom he had admitted to his most unreserved intimacy; or if it had been done in any other way: if the wretched man had thrown off the mask; if he had openly joined the Jews and Roman soldiers; if he had come out like the rest, sword in hand, it would have been less bitter. But to come as a friend; to come as a cherished disciple; to come with a kiss—Oh! that was too much. That was the deep and cruel pang that pierced our Saviour to the heart! It is of this that our Lord complains by the mouth of the Psalmist: “If my enemy had reviled me, I would indeed have borne it; and if he that hateth me had spoken grievous things against me, I would, perhaps, have hidden myself from him. But thou, a man of my own mind, my guide and my familiar! In the house of God we walked with consent.” But, oh! how much more justly may Jesus make the same complaint of the sacrilegious communicant? The Holy Eucharist is the pledge of love. In holy communion God lovingly caresses the soul. When St. John reposed on our Lord’s bosom, he did not enjoy so much familiarity with him as does the soul that receives Jesus in holy communion. We call it “communion,” because it is a union between the soul and God. How horrible, then, must it be to abuse this holy sacrament, to receive it with a traitor’s heart! How painful must it be to our Lord to receive a false caress; to be folded in a sinful embrace; to be brought into the loathsome prison of a wicked heart! O, loving Saviour! how great is the wrong that is done to thy love! Well has the prophet predicted of thee: “The wicked have fought against me

without a cause. Instead of making me a return for my love, they have only repaid me with evil and hate. They spoke indeed peaceably to me, but they devised guile. Their words were smoother than oil, but they are cruel darts." Sweet Jesus, from the tabernacle I hear thy outraged heart complain: "Behold, all ye that pass by the way, come and see the wounds with which I have been wounded in the house of my friends; attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow!" The base treachery of Judas, however, was but the prelude to the many outrages that were heaped upon our Lord by the Jewish priests and people. These, too, find a parallel in each unworthy communion. When David had cut off a part of the mantle of Saul, his royal enemy, his heart smote him because he had "lifted his hand against the anointed of the Lord." Indeed, this feeling was quite natural, for the greatness of an injury depends always on the dignity of the person offended. Who would not feel more indignant at seeing a parent dishonored than a stranger? It is related in the life of St. Joseph Calasancius, that, in his old age, he was summoned before court on some frivolous charge. He was rudely dragged from the altar; he was hurried through the public streets bare-headed, under a burning sun, amid the shouts and jeers of the populace. Who could have looked upon the serene face of that hoary old man, as he was thus ignominiously dragged along, without being moved to tears? How horrible a crime would it be, in the eyes of the Catholic world, to kill a bishop at the altar, or the Pope upon his throne! Justice would require that such a criminal should be punished with much greater severity than an ordinary murderer. How grievous, then, must have been the

crime of those who persecuted our Lord himself! Let us read the simple words of Holy Scripture: "He was despised and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with infirmity; he was led as a sheep to the slaughter; he was mute as a lamb before his shearers, and he opened not his mouth; he gave his cheek to the striker, and he was filled with reproaches; he was made a derision to the people and their song all the day long; he was cut off from the land of the living." We feel the deep meaning of those words only when we ask, as the eunuch did of St. Philip: "Of whom doth the prophet speak?" That face, bruised with blows and defiled with spittle, is the face of God—that face which is the everlasting brightness of heaven; those hands, transfixed with nails, are the hands of the Almighty, who, in his wisdom, laid the foundations of the universe; he who hangs between two malefactors on the accursed tree, is the Immaculate Lamb of God, the eternal Son of the Father. "Ah!" you exclaim, "here human wickedness has reached its height!" Can there be a greater proof of God's patience than his forbearance at the perpetration of a crime like this? Yes, I will assert, that almost every instance of unworthy communion is even a stronger proof of God's patient endurance. In some respects, the dishonor which is shown our Lord in an unworthy communion is far greater than that which was shown him at his death. Then, indeed, he died a death of shame; but it was for the salvation of the world. He offered his soul because *he willed* it. He was satisfied, because he saw the abundant fruits of his labors. But when he is received unworthily in holy communion, he is crucified anew, without any compensation, and against his will. He is brought as a prisoner into the

horrid and filthy dungeon of a sinful heart. He is chained there to passions which he loathes; he is forced to become, as it were, *one* with the sinner. Can anything be conceived more horrible than this? Would it not be far better that the sacred host should be thrown upon a dung-hill; that it should be devoured by an unclean beast, than that it should be received into a heart defiled with mortal sin? Most certainly; for, in that case, our Lord would suffer no real dishonor. He fills all things, and is essentially everywhere. He cannot be sullied except in the heart of the sinner, where he is brought into contact with that which alone is hateful to him—with *sin*. It is related in the annals of the Society of Jesus, that a young man who, through shame, had concealed a mortal sin in confession, had the rashness to receive holy communion; but, on attempting to swallow the host, he was seized with such excruciating pains that he was compelled to rush out of the church, and to cast forth the sacred particle into the filth of the street. After this he felt instantly relieved. Our Lord gave him thereby to understand that the very filth of the street was more acceptable to him than a heart that is defiled by sin.

**9. What are often the evil effects of unworthy communion, even in this life?**

*Blindness of the understanding, hardness of the heart, apostasy from the faith, temporal punishments, and sometimes a sudden death.*

Should any amongst us be still unmoved, still callous, grant, O Lord, that we may at least be touched by thy chastisements! The impious Abiron placed his sacrilegious hand upon the censer, and immediately the earth



opened and swallowed him alive. (Numbers xvi.) The neglectful sons of the high-priest Aaron filled their censers with unhallowed fire, and, in an instant, fire from heaven destroyed them. Ophni and Phinees profaned the sacrifice offered to the Lord, and shortly after they fell beneath the sword of the enemy. Thus did God punish the disobedience of Israel. How will he, then, punish him who attacks his own divine person, in whose name altars are erected and sacrifices offered? How will he punish him who is guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ? It is evident that far severer punishment awaits him who tramples upon the Son of God, profanes the Blood of the Covenant, and insults the Spirit of Grace.

The Bethsamites cast a curious glance at the ark of the covenant, and, soon after, the ground was strewn with their dead bodies. Balthasar laid his profane hands upon the sacred vessels, and there suddenly appeared a hand upon the wall, tracing in letters of fire the doom of the sacrilegious monarch. Antiochus plundered the Temple of Jerusalem, and the avenging hand of God stretched him upon a bed of agonizing pain, where he died of a loathsome disease. Such were the chastisements of the Almighty in the Old Law. What, then, will be the punishment of him who dishonors, not the ark of the covenant, but the body of Jesus; what shall be the punishment of him who not merely raises to his polluted lips the holy vessels, but receives into his sinful heart the thrice holy God himself; what shall be the punishment of him who draws the Lord of Hosts from his sanctuary to place him side by side with Satan in his heart; who becomes guilty of the body and blood of Jesus Christ? What shall be the punishment of such a guilty wretch? Listen, once

more, to the words of St. Paul: listen and tremble! "He who eats of this bread and drinks of this chalice unworthily, eats and drinks judgment to himself!" What a terrible expression! Eats and drinks judgment to himself! Eats and drinks his own damnation! That is to say, his condemnation penetrates his innermost being. It incorporates itself with him; it flows in his veins; it becomes one flesh, one blood, one being with him. O frightful punishment! He eats and drinks his own judgment! And what kind of judgment does he eat and drink? A judgment involving darkness of the understanding and hardness of heart, to a most frightful degree; possession of the devil, despair, an impenitent death and everlasting malediction. These punishments are, in a particular manner, indicated by the words of St. Paul: "He eateth and drinketh judgment to himself." Nothing makes any longer an impression upon the sacrilegious communicant; he is no longer edified at praiseworthy actions; he scoffs at those who practise virtue; all admonition is lost on him; he does not understand the heinousness of his crime. What is here said of the unworthy communion he does not believe; he is perfectly indifferent to the affair of his salvation; his thoughts no longer rise above the narrow and impure circle of earthly interests; he is like a worm which, day and night, sucks nourishment from the earth, its native element, groveling all the while in the mire; he cares little for spiritual things; eternal punishment has no terrors for him. In such a condition, what is there that he will shrink from undertaking? We might, indeed, say to this wretch when he is leaving the sacred table, what Jesus said to his betrayer: "What thou wilt do, do quickly." Go now and accomplish thy criminal designs; let loose thy passions, for, since thou

hast dared to dishonor the body of Christ, nothing will appear horrible or abominable to thee ; nothing will be able henceforth to restrain thee. Unhappy wretch ! hitherto thou hast been preserved from certain abominations by an innate feeling of horror ; but now, go boldly forward ; wallow in sin, for thy conscience will no longer reproach thee ! Go on in the road to Sodom and Gomorrah ! Give thyself up to the base desires of thy heart ! ”

No ! nothing makes an impression upon such a heart. I here speak of what usually happens. Our Lord might, indeed, mournfully exclaim, in the presence of such a sacrilegious wretch : “ Verily, verily, one of you is about to betray me ; ” it would make but little impression upon him. Should he even hear from Jesus’ own lips the terrible words, “ Woe to him by whom the Son of Man will be betrayed,” the unhappy man would remain cold and unmoved. Even were Jesus to call such a sinner “ friend,” and give him the kiss of peace, it would be all in vain. Even were he to work miracles before him, the eyes of the wretched sinner would still remain closed ; or, if they opened, it would be only to cast him into despair ; to urge him, like Judas, to execute the sentence of his damnation. In a word, the spirit of darkness, Satan, takes complete possession of the sacrilegious communicant. Is not Judas a most terrible example of this ? He received unworthily, and immediately the devil entered into him.

St. Cyprian tells us of a certain young woman who, after an unworthy communion, was instantly possessed by the devil. She became furious, and in her rage bit her tongue, and endeavored to kill herself. At last, she died in horrible agony. Behold the judgment of God ! No wonder that the unworthy receiver so often renounces his

faith and becomes a bitter enemy of Christ and his religion. But, what is even worse than all, this sin dries up the fountain of hope in the breast, and plunges the unhappy sinner into despair. Judas is but too sad an illustration of this, also. After his sacrilege, "*he went out and hanged himself!*"

Again, the sacrilegious communicant eats and drinks his own judgment! What kind of judgment does he eat and drink? A sentence of eternal damnation; a sentence of never-ending woe; a sentence sealed with the blood of Christ himself; a sentence which is often carried into execution even in this world! "You see," continues St. Paul, "your houses daily falling to ruin; you behold the daily ravages of war and pestilence; you see how unexpectedly death everywhere seizes upon its victims; you see how many among you are dragging along weak bodies, never enjoying an hour's health."

Why, think you, do these troubles press upon you? Because many among you partake unworthily of the body and blood of Christ. The terrible death of King Lothaire, and his vassals is but too evident an illustration of this. Lothaire, king of Lorraine, conceived a great dislike to his lawful queen. His eyes fell upon a beautiful young maid of honor in his court, named Waldrada, and his heart followed his eyes. The Pope was informed of this scandal, and he commanded Lothaire to quit his paramour and to take back his lawful wife. He threatened to excommunicate the wicked king in case of refusal. Lothaire made a thousand false promises; he even went to Rome in order to be absolved from the ban he had incurred. He requested the Pope to reconcile him solemnly during Mass, and he wished to receive holy communion from the hands of the



Pope himself. The Pontiff took the most prudent measures to find out the sincerity of the king's intentions, but all to no purpose. He then celebrated Mass. The king, with many of the nobles of his court, was present. The time of communion came, and the king, with his nobles, went to the altar-rail to receive. The Pope then turned to the monarch, and, holding the sacred host in his hand, said in a loud and distinct voice: "O king, if you are sincerely resolved to quit Waldrada and to take back your lawful wife, then receive this holy sacrament unto life everlasting; but if you are not sincerely resolved, then do not dare to profane the sacred body of Jesus Christ, and eat your own damnation." Lothaire turned pale and trembled, but he had already made a sacrilegious confession, and now he sealed his doom by adding a sacrilegious communion. The Pope turned then to the noblemen, who were kneeling beside their king, and said to them: "If you have taken no part in the crime of your king, then may the body of our Lord Jesus Christ be to you a pledge of eternal salvation." Some of the noblemen were terrified and left the altar-rail without receiving, but the greater part of them followed the example of their king. They committed a fearful crime, and the punishment of God was swift and terrible. The king and his suite quitted Rome. They had no sooner arrived at the city of Lucca than they were attacked by a most malignant fever, in consequence of which they lost their speech; they were tormented by an inward fire, and their nails, hair, and skin fell off! Several of the noblemen died before the king's eyes. But Lothaire heeded not this fearful warning. He continued his journey, and thought day and night of the object of his passion. When he came to Piacenza, he lost his speech. Soon after, he lost all consciousness, and died

without giving the least sign of repentance. Every one of those who had received unworthily died the same terrible death ; while those, on the contrary, who had not received communion did not suffer the slightest indisposition.

The following example was witnessed by a priest of my acquaintance. He was called to the death-bed of a young man. No sooner had the dying youth perceived the Blessed Sacrament, than he exclaimed : “ Behold him whom I received unworthily at my First Communion ! ” and, turning his face towards the wall, he expired. But, oh, how terrible shall be the remorse of the sacrilegious communicant in hell ! Words are powerless to describe it. The story of the wanderer mentioned in the “ Spiritual Meadows,” furnishes but a feeble illustration of it. There was a certain convent of most austere discipline, presided over by an abbot of strict and holy life. One day, a stranger came to this convent asking admission. He was received, and lived there for nine years in the practice of the most rigorous penance. At the end of that time, he came to the abbot and told him, that an infant whom he had slain, when he followed the life of a highwayman, had appeared to him and said in the most heart-rending tone of voice : “ Why didst thou kill me ? ” The abbot treated the poor man as if he were the victim of a diseased imagination, and bade him go work in the garden. The penitent did so, but the voice still rang in his ears : “ Why didst thou kill me ? ” He went to the church to pray, but the voice followed him thither. At last, no longer able to endure his sufferings, he threw off the religious habit, went to the civil magistrate, confessed his crime, and begged to be condemned to death. His request was granted and he was executed. Oh ! if remorse can inflict so terrible a sting in this life, what will it

be to hear the eternal cry of conscience in the caverns of hell ; the eternal malediction of Jesus Christ against those who have outraged him in the most holy sacrament !

Such, then, is the life and death of the unworthy communicant. Having committed deicide, he must be punished according to the enormity of his guilt. The bread of life becomes in his mouth the bread of malediction for body and soul, for time and for eternity. O terrible crime ! O frightful punishment ! But must the sacrilegious communicant despair forever ? By no means. Let him earnestly repent ; let him do worthy penance, and he will receive pardon from God, who never repels a contrite and humble heart. A most efficacious means for obtaining the grace of true sorrow is to have recourse to the Mother of God, that, by her powerful intercession, she may move the heart of her divine Son to forgive the heinous crime ; that she may obtain for the unworthy communicant the courage to confess his sin, as well as the gift of tears to weep over it, in order that thus, through the merits of the same blood which he has defiled, he may receive again, by sacramental absolution, the grace of justification.

#### **10. Do venial sins render our communions unworthy ?**

*No ; but, on account of them, Christ withholds from us many graces.*

It would be cruel to dismiss a servant for every trifling offence ; but, if he should rebel against his master, abuse and strike him, he would certainly deserve to be dismissed, or severely punished. In like manner, he who offends Almighty God by mortal sin, deserves to be excluded from his friendship ; he deserves to be banished from the house of God ; to be excluded from heaven. But he who

commits only a venial sin does not deserve so severe a chastisement. Nevertheless, even venial sin is hateful in the eyes of God. Anger, for instance, displeases the meekness of God; envy displeases the charity of God; an uncharitable word displeases the goodness of God; a wilful lie displeases the truth and holiness of God; even a slight theft offends God's justice. Every venial sin is an act of ingratitude to our Creator. God will never sanction a venial sin, even were it to effect the greatest possible good; even were you to save thereby all the damned in hell, or prevent the damnation of all mankind. In fact, we dishonor God more by one venial sin, than we can honor him by all our good works. It is better to abstain from one venial sin than to perform all the good actions possible.

Although venial sins are very displeasing to God, yet they do not necessarily render our communions unworthy. The reason is because, how great soever the number of our venial sins may be, they do not deprive us of sanctifying grace; and he who receives holy communion in the state of grace, receives it worthily. However, it must be remembered, that to receive communion worthily is one thing; and to receive it profitably is another.

One day, a certain king went to visit several cities of his kingdom. Some of these cities received him coldly, while others made extraordinary preparations to receive him in a manner worthy of his high rank. To reward these cities for their love and devotedness, the king gave them magnificent presents. But to the inhabitants of those cities who had made but ordinary preparations for his reception, the king gave but ordinary gifts. Now, Jesus Christ treats us in the same manner when he visits us in holy communion. If we prepare very carefully for holy communion; if we



confess and detest, not only all our mortal sins, but even all our venial sins, Jesus will unite himself more intimately to our souls and communicate his graces to us more abundantly. But if we receive him in holy communion in the state of venial sin, especially such sins as are habitual and are the result of negligence and want of good will, he will withhold from us many precious graces.

Holy communion usually produces a certain interior calm; it gives us a peculiar delicacy of conscience which instantly warns us against the very first motions of irregular passion, and gives us the grace and strength to crush them without delay.

The spiritual sweetness which we receive in holy communion helps to soothe the irritable propensities of our poor fallen nature. Those who communicate frequently and prepare properly for communion, are usually gifted with great self-control and a sweet unruffled disposition.

Those who do not derive this sweetness of disposition from communion, should carefully examine their conscience, to find out what it is that hinders the good effect of this great sacrament, and use every effort to remove such obstacle.

There is a Christian. He is not in the habit of committing wilful venial sins. On the contrary, he is most watchful over his thoughts, desires, words and actions. He strives not to think, desire, say, or do anything by which God could be offended. He often receives holy communion. He understands the full meaning of the words of the Psalmist: "O taste and see that the Lord is sweet." And if, at times, he fails to taste of the heavenly sweetness hidden in holy communion, it is because our Lord wishes to keep him humble, as he himself declared to St. Gertrude.

But there is one kind of sweetness which he always finds in holy communion—the sweetness of doing God's will with a cheerful heart.

The mother-in-law of St. Peter had a fever. Jesus came to her. He touched her hand, as he touches us in holy communion. The fever instantly left her. She *rose up directly and served them at table*. This is what holy communion does for us. It makes us rise up directly and do what duty requires of us. You are called in the morning, you rise up directly. It is time to say your prayers; you rise directly and go and say them. Your duty calls you here or there. You rise up directly and go. Father Surin says: "I received, in holy communion, grace to do those duties which it is naturally very painful and difficult to do." Oil makes the wheels of a carriage go along the road easily and without creaking. The grace of holy communion makes us go easily and sweetly along the path of our duties. "*My yoke is sweet and my burden is light.*" (Matt. xi.) Such is the sweetness given by holy communion.

But this kind of sweetness is generally not experienced by those who are addicted to certain venial sins. Venial sin lessens God's affection for us. It cools the fire of charity. If the flames of this divine charity are diminished in us, we have no longer the same ardor for the glory of God. God no longer converses so familiarly with us in holy communion. He becomes less prodigal of his gifts and graces.

## **II. Which are the best exercises of devotion before Holy Communion?**

*The acts of faith, hope, and love; acts of humility, heartfelt sorrow, and great desire.*

Undoubtedly, at no time of our life should the sentiments of our heart towards Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament appear more manifest than when we are about to receive him in holy communion. These sentiments are those of faith, hope, love, contrition, adoration, humility and desire. These acts of devotion should be short and simple. They should be said slowly, a few words at a time, that they may sink deep into the heart. It is well to say each prayer several times over. Jesus Christ repeated the same prayer over and over again. His simple prayer was—"Thy will be done." Let us, at such a moment, address our Saviour in words like the following :

O what peace, what untold gladness  
Fills my soul this blissful day !  
Jesus leaves his throne of glory  
For this lowly hut of clay.  
My poor heart that, like the stable,  
Once was cheerless and defiled,  
Jesus blesses with his presence,—  
Ah, dear Saviour, fond and mild,  
With thy pure hands wounded for me,  
Heal the soul of thy weak child.

As the golden rays of morning  
Scatter all the clouds of night,  
Bathing hill and vale and forest  
In their glorious living light ;  
So, dear Lord, thy loving presence  
Scatters all my doubts and fears,  
Changes grief to light and gladness,  
And to sparkling gems my tears.  
May my soul forever bless thee,  
Lord, through heaven's unending years !

Angels bright join your glad voices,  
Bending low with folded wings,  
Sing with me the loving kindness  
Of the glorious King of kings ;

In my trembling heart he enters,  
Heals my soul's deep, nameless pain,  
Breathes upon the cheerless desert  
Till bright flowers bloom again.  
May my heart forever bless thee,  
Dearest Lord, in joy and pain !

## **12. In what manner should we go to Holy Communion ?**

*With the greatest reverence, with folded hands, and eyes modestly cast down.*

St. Charles Borromeo gives several most useful instructions on the manner in which holy communion should be received. According to these instructions, the communicant should go to the communion-rail, with his hands folded, with his eyes modestly cast down, and with his thoughts on Jesus Christ, whom he is going to receive. When he comes to the communion-rail, he should kneel down on the highest step, and hold the communion cloth with both hands under the chin. He should not bow his head, but hold it erect, and open the mouth, so that the priest may easily and reverently place the sacred host on the tongue. The extremity of the tongue should rest on the under lip. The tongue should not be withdrawn until the priest has placed the Blessed Sacrament upon it. After receiving, the communicant should incline his head a little and immediately swallow the sacred host reverently, taking care not to raise the tongue to the palate.

There are some communicants who keep the sacred host on their tongue until it is entirely consumed. This is wrong. According to our Lord's command we are to eat his sacred flesh as the food of our soul. No one, however, can be said to have eaten bread as long as he has not swallowed it. In like manner, no one can be said to have



eaten the sacred flesh of our Lord, if he has not swallowed the sacred host or at least part of it. In many churches the sacred particles are so thin that they melt on the tongue almost before they can be swallowed. Those, therefore, who prepare the bread for the altar should take care that the particles for consecration are not too thin. It is, then, a false devotion to keep the sacred host on the tongue until it is entirely melted away.

**13. If the Sacred Host adheres to the roof of the mouth, how should it be removed?**

*We should remove it, not with the fingers, but with the tongue.*

By raising the tongue to the palate, it sometimes happens that the sacred host clings to the roof of the mouth. In this case, the sacred body of our Lord should be removed, not with the fingers, but with the tongue. The communicant should also take care not to spit out for at least a quarter of an hour after communion. He should abstain, if possible, from taking food for half an hour after communion. To take food immediately after communion, without some reasonable cause, cannot be excused from venial sin, according to the more probable opinion of theologians. The reason is, that there is a certain irreverence in taking food while the consecrated species remains unaltered.

**14. What should we do after Communion?**

*We should return with great modesty to our place, and spend half an hour, or at least a quarter of an hour, in thanksgiving, asking especially of our divine Saviour to make us love him in time and in eternity.*

When Judas had received holy communion, he made no

thanksgiving. He went out instantly and sold our Lord. Who will resemble that wicked traitor? Indeed, a good thanksgiving after communion is even of greater importance than a good preparation for communion. St. John Chrysostom says, that when a person has eaten some delicious food at a banquet, he is careful not to take anything bitter in his mouth immediately after, lest he should lose the sweet flavor of those delicate viands. In like manner, when we have received the precious body of Jesus Christ, we should take care not to lose its heavenly flavor by turning too soon to the cares and business of the world.

St. Francis de Sales expresses the same idea. "When the merchants of India," he says, "have brought home their precious porcelain, they are very careful in conveying it to their store-houses, lest they should stumble and break their costly wares. In like manner, should the Christian, when he carries the priceless treasure of our Lord's body, walk with great care and circumspection, in order not to lose the costly gift committed to his keeping. The meaning of both saints is, that after communion we should spend some time in devout recollection and prayer. This is the general practice of good Catholics. And, indeed, reason itself tells us, that a good thanksgiving after communion is even of more importance than a good preparation for it.

If we are obliged to prepare for communion, what should be our devotion when our Lord is actually in our hearts? When the Blessed Virgin Mary visited St. Elizabeth, the aged saint was so astonished at the condescension of the glorious Mother of God, that she cried out: "Whence is this to me, that the Mother of my God should come to me?" Now, in holy communion, it is the

Lord himself that comes to us; the eternal "Wisdom which proceeded from the mouth of the Most High"; the "Lord and Prince of the house of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the burning bush;" the "King of nations"; "Emmanuel," "our King and Law-giver." To remain indifferent, after having received the Blessed Eucharist, is to evince either a total want of faith or a levity and stupidity unworthy of a reasonable being. What a spectacle for the angels, to see a creature approach that sacred host before which they bow in lowliest adoration, and, after having had the unutterable happiness of receiving the Redeemer, to leave the church with as much unconcern as if he had partaken of ordinary bread! Were an ignorant peasant guilty of such a fault, he might be pardoned; but for a well-instructed Catholic to be guilty of such shameful ingratitude towards Jesus Christ, is a fault so unpardonable that it seems to me nothing but the mercy of our Lord can prevent the angels from avenging the impiety.

St. Alphonsus relates that a certain priest, seeing a man leave the church immediately after communion, sent the acolytes, with lighted candles, to accompany him. "What is the matter?" asked the man. "Oh," said the boys, "we come to honor our Lord, who is still present in your heart." If all those who follow the example of this ind devout communicant, received the same reproof, the scandal of leaving the church immediately after communion, would soon cease. Although the majesty of our Lord should induce us not to leave him alone in our hearts after communion, yet it is not the argument which he himself employs. There is in this sacrament nothing that breathes of majesty. Our Lord is silent, whether we leave the church immediately or kneel and reverently converse with

him. The stones do not cry out against our ingratitude, if, after eating the bread of angels, we neglect to give thanks to God. Jesus Christ might send twelve legions of angels to stand around us after we have left his table, to remind us that he is present in our hearts ; but he prefers not to do this. Now it is from this very fact of *not* surrounding himself with anything calculated to inspire fear, that we ought to draw the most powerful incentive to gratitude and love.

This sacrament is the sacrament of love. In it God is pleased to treat with his creatures in all familiarity. Jesus Christ, having accomplished the work of our Redemption, draws nigh to converse with us, as he did to the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. He wishes to speak to us as a friend to a friend. What an affront, then, to leave him the moment he comes to us ! Would you not consider it the greatest rudeness, if, after having travelled far to see a friend, he were to go off and leave you all alone, scarcely deigning to say even a word to you ? Suppose a dear friend should visit you, would you not give him a cordial welcome and prepare the best room in your house, and adorn it with the richest furniture ? Would you not sacrifice your time to keep him company, and give him some tokens of love before allowing him to depart ? Now, should you not do at least as much for Jesus Christ, who has come so far to visit you ; who has suffered so much for your sake ; who is always thinking of you, and has given you so many proofs of his love ? This is the motive that Jesus Christ himself prefers to place before us, in order to incite us to make a due thanksgiving after communion, and it is one which must have irresistible weight with every honest heart.



We will now consider the manner in which we ought to make our thanksgiving. What has been said of the preparation for communion, is equally true here, viz., that each one is free to use such prayers as he shall find most suited to his devotion. A good thanksgiving consists, first, in uniting ourselves intimately with our Lord by offering ourselves entirely to him. The moment of communion is the most precious moment of our lives. Then we can truly exclaim: "My God, and my All!" When we communicate, God himself is present in our hearts, as our friend and bridegroom. Nothing can be more intimate than the union that then takes place between the Creator and his creature. It is more like the Incarnation of the eternal Son of God in the womb of the Virgin Mary than anything else. To her it was said, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also, the Holy One which is to be born of thee, shall be called the Son of God." Now the same Son of God, the Holy One, that was born of the spotless Virgin, comes into our hearts in the sacred host. Think of all that is most beautiful and most precious in the world; think of all the riches of the universe, all the glory of heaven, and you have, as yet, but a faint idea of the priceless treasure which a soul receives in holy communion. Such a soul possesses not only earth and heaven, but the Lord and Maker of heaven and earth. Communion is a mystery which almost baffles thought. Certainly God can never cease to be what he is; he can never cease to be awful in his greatness, and infinite in his wisdom; our Ruler, our King, and our Judge; but in this sacrament, as if he had nothing to think of but the soul which he comes to visit, he lavishes upon her all the riches of his bounty, and reveals himself to

her in the most amiable and most *humble* manner. Perhaps it is for this reason that he has been pleased so often to manifest himself as an *Infant* in the sacred host, in order to show us how small he has become for love of us, and to take away from us all fear. Of old it was said, *Magnus Dominus et laudabilis nimis*. "Great is the Lord and exceedingly to be praised"; but now we may say rather, *Parvus Dominus et amabilis nimis*. "Small is the Lord and exceedingly to be loved." Accordingly we find from the expressions of the saints, that the thought which possessed their souls after communion, was admiration at the unutterable love of God.

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi once asked a pious person after communion, of what she was thinking. "Of love," was her reply. "Yes," rejoined the saint, "when we think of the immense love of Jesus Christ for us, we cannot think of anything else."

He who has received holy communion can truly exclaim with the spouse in the Canticles: "I found him whom my soul loveth. I held him, and I will not let him go." (Cant. iii., 4.) Creatures, depart from me, go altogether from my heart. I loved you once, because I was blind. Now I love you not, nor can I ever love you again. I have found another good, infinitely more delightful than you. I have found in myself my Jesus, who has enamored me by his beauty. He has already accepted me, so that I am no longer my own. Creatures, farewell. I am not, nor shall I ever again be yours. I am and shall always be Christ's. He is mine, and will be always mine.

However, it is not enough to wonder at our Saviour's love. Love, to produce union, must be mutual. We must give Jesus love for love.

In childhood, my Spouse divine taught me  
 His name and his pure hallowed love ;  
 His name that e'er thrills my heart strangely,  
 His love that is far, far above  
 The fond love of angel or mother, —  
 O, ne'er shall earth know such another !  
 The heart that has known them can never  
 Forget the pure joys of his love.

A robe white and stainless he gave me,  
 More costly than queens of earth wear,  
 And jewels far brighter than sunlight,  
 Than diamonds or rubies more rare ;  
 With faith, hope and pure love he blessed me,  
 And then to his burning heart pressed me ;—  
 O, fondly I'll guard and I'll cherish  
 His gifts and his pure love fore'er !

A food sweet and wondrous he gave me,  
 The food of bright angels above ;  
 He gave me to drink his fond Heart's blood—  
 O, fathomless depths of God's love !  
 When wounded and bowed down with sadness,  
 He healed me, and gave peace and gladness,—  
 Sweet Jesu, so loving and faithful,  
 O, teach me to give love for love !

Ah ! now is the time to repay Jesus for the trials and tears, the shame and sorrow, the contradictions and reproaches which he underwent for the ransom of our souls. Our souls were his already by the title of creation, and now they belong to him by the title of redemption. We must make to him a childlike, generous, sincere, and complete oblation. "But what," you say, "have I to offer ? I am poor and needy, what can I give to the Lord of heaven and earth ?" I will tell you. Imitate Æschines, a disciple of Socrates, of whom Seneca relates that, not being able, on account of his poverty, to make such rich presents to his master as his fellow-disciples did, he went to Socrates and said : "Master, my extreme poverty

leaves me nothing to give you as a token of my gratitude ; I offer you, then, myself, to be yours forever." " Truly," said Socrates, " you have given me more than all the rest." Act thus with Jesus Christ. You have no treasure to offer him ; you have no station to renounce for him ; you have no occasion to die for him ; you cannot do for him what he has done for you, but you can give him that which he values more than anything else—your heart.

There is nothing that gives so much pleasure to Jesus as a heart truly resolved to serve him. Give him, then, this pleasure ; offer yourself to him, to be disposed of as he pleases: to receive at his hand bitter and sweet, indifferently ; to serve him with all the fervor that you can ; to avoid sin and to lead a Christian life. Do this, and then your communion will be really a communion, that is to say, a union with God.

The good and the bad receive the body of Christ alike ; but it is the good alone who are truly united to him. Are you, perhaps, afraid to make the promises which Jesus asks of you ? " It is easy," you say, " to make an offering of ourselves to Jesus, but it is not so easy to carry it into effect." Oh, Christian soul, thou dost not yet understand the generosity of love ! Did not our Lord ask St. James and St. John whether they were ready to drink of his chalice, before he actually gave them the grace of martyrdom ? Did he not make us promise to renounce the devil and his works, and his pomps, and to live in obedience to the Christian law, before he adopted us as his children in Baptism ? We must first promise much, and then God will help us to do much. He comes into our hearts, not only to claim them as his own, but to give us grace whereby we may make them truly his. After we have



made an oblation of ourselves to him, we must immediately proceed to beg of him the grace to fulfil that which we have promised—and this is the second part of a good thanksgiving.

There is no doubt that *petitioning* our Lord for special graces should be our principal occupation after communion. “The time after communion,” says St. Theresa, “is the best time for negotiating with Jesus Christ; for then he is in the soul, seated, as it were, on a throne of grace, and saying, as he said to the blind man: “What wilt thou that I should do to thee?” Another great servant of God says that, in the beginning of his conversion, he was accustomed to employ the time after communion, chiefly in making devout aspirations; but that afterwards he devoted almost the whole time to petition, which he found more profitable to his soul. When a prince goes to pay a short visit to his subjects, his whole time is taken up in hearing their complaints, in redressing their grievances, in consoling them in their miseries, and in relieving their wants. So, Jesus Christ, our heavenly King, comes in this sacrament to inquire into our wants and to relieve them. I say to inquire into our wants, not as if he needed to be informed of them, but because, as St. Alphonsus says, he wishes that we should lay them before him. When the storm was raging on the sea of Tiberias, our Lord continued to sleep in the ship, although he knew well the danger of his disciples. Why did he do this? It was because he wished that they should awaken him and implore his aid. Lay then, before Jesus all your troubles, your weaknesses, your fears and your desires.

Are you in temporal difficulties? Hear what he has said: “What man is there among you of whom, if his son

ask bread, will he reach him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he reach him a serpent? If you, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven, give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. vii., 9-11.)

Are you a poor widow? Your husband has perhaps been long since taken from you. Those hands which labored for you are stiff and cold; that heart which throbbed for you is still in death. You know, from bitter experience, what it is to be a widow; what it is to be alone in the world; what it is to toil from morning till night for your helpless little ones. Ah! how often have you wished that the good Jesus who raised the widow's son to life, would bring back your loving husband from the grave! You cannot indeed call your good husband back to life. But you can aid him by your prayers. Pray for him, then, especially after communion, when our Lord is in your heart. He who is the Consoler of the afflicted, the Support of the widow, and the Father of the orphan will protect and console you.

Or perhaps your husband is yet living. He has to toil for you from morning till night. Pray that God may give him strength and health. Perhaps he is a careless Catholic, or no Catholic; perhaps he is a member of some excommunicated secret society. Perhaps he is a man who gives bad example to yourself and children—an unhappy drunkard, a man of violent temper; or, what is worse, faithless to his marriage-vows! Your married life has been a long-continued martyrdom. Every day has its new sorrows, every day its trials and its tears! Tell, then, our Lord, in all confidence, all your terrible troubles and trials. At all events, unite your sufferings with those of our blessed Lord. Offer them up to him for the conversion of your

husband. Pray for him. Pray also for unalterable patience. Our Lord is in your heart to give you all you desire.

You have children too. Now is the time to pray for them. These immortal souls have been confided to your care. You will have to answer for each one of them before the judgment-seat of God. The world is full of snares and scandals, full of dangers, even for those who are grown; how much more dangerous for young and inexperienced children. See! after communion, Jesus dwells in your heart. Pray then, pray fervently, for your children.

Your son, perhaps, is far away. He may be, at this very moment, in the greatest danger of soul or body—perhaps on the ocean, perhaps in the glaring bar-room, at the gambling-table, or, worse still, leading down on the road to hell some poor lost creature whose father's home was deserted and whose mother's heart was broken, long ago.

Your daughter, perhaps, is employed in some distant city. She left you, pure and innocent. God grant that she may be so still! Ah! who shall watch over her? Who shall advise and protect her? Perhaps she is now in the brilliant ball-room, perhaps in the most dangerous company, alone with some wicked wretch who only seeks her ruin, who is resolved not to rest until her ruin is accomplished! O God! how you would shudder and weep could you but see her danger! Pray then, pray with tears, pray that your child may rather die than fall into the horrible degradation of sin!

At home, you have so much work on your hands, you have so many dependent on you, you have but little time for rest and prayer. Perhaps the only time you have is while you are in church. Make, then, a good use of

these precious moments. Beg our Lord to watch over your entire household. Place it all under his special protection.

Pray also for the dead. You solemnly promised to assist them. It was their dying request. Be faithful to your promise.

Do you wish to subdue your passions and disorderly affections? Hear what Jesus has said: "As the division of waters, so the heart of the king is in my hands." (Prov. xxi., 1.) If the hearts of kings are like wax in his hands, is he not able to change your heart also? Is he not able to convert you as he converted the prophet David, St. Mary Magdalen, St. Paul, St. Margaret of Cortona, and a host of others? Ask him, then, to destroy in you what is bad, and to make you what you wish to be; to change your wavering purpose into a firm resolution; your fear of self-discipline into an earnest desire to advance in virtue and holiness. Ask him to change your dissipated heart into a recollected one; your unmortified heart into a mortified one; your ambitious heart into a humble one; your faint and timid heart into a brave and courageous one; your irritable and peevish heart into a mild and patient one; your sinful heart into a holy one.

In the life of St. Catharine of Sienna, we read of a wonderful grace that she received from our Lord. He took out her heart and gave her *his* in its place. Each one of us has it in his power to receive a grace somewhat similar. Let us only ask of Jesus Christ, and he will transform us, as it were, into himself. Let us say—

A prayer for all our friends afar,—  
A prayer for those who still are near;  
O, shield them, Lord, from sin and woe!  
Be their names e'er to memory dear!



For those who fight for truth and right,  
 Though foes deride and friends betray ;—  
 Give strength that they may falter not !  
 For these, dear Lord, we humbly pray.

A prayer for those who sow in tears  
 What other hearts in joy shall reap ;  
 Who teach young hearts God's wondrous love ;  
 Who teach cold, stony hearts to weep.  
 Give strength that they may weary not ;  
 Let hope's sweet light shine on their way,  
 May grateful hearts e'er round them smile !—  
 For these, dear Lord, we humbly pray.

A prayer for those who, night by night,  
 Watch near the weary couch of pain ;  
 Who, in each lowly, stricken form,  
 See Christ's sweet blessed face again.

A prayer for all pure, hidden souls ;  
 For our dear friends who've passed away ;  
 For all our friends and all our foes—  
 For these, dear Lord, for these we pray !

After communion, let us pray to our Lord for humility, for patience, for meekness, for contempt of the world, for a lively faith, a firm hope, an ardent charity ; for brotherly love, for love of our enemies, for the prosperity of the Church, for the conversion of sinners, heretics, and infidels ; for devotion to his Passion, to the Blessed Sacrament, to his Immaculate Mother ; and especially for the crowning grace of perseverance ; and he will give us all, for his arm is not shortened nor his love diminished. The Sacrament of the Eucharist never grows old ; it is as efficient now as it was at the time of the apostles. Ask ! There is that nothing our Lord will refuse, especially if it be for the good of your soul. If you are diligent in asking graces of him after communion, if you persevere in asking, with a real desire to obtain what you ask, you will infallibly become a saint, yea, a great saint.

There is another exercise of devotion which should form part of your thanksgiving after communion. I mean *Praise*. It is good sometimes to rejoice; it enlarges the heart and gives us courage. "Rejoice in the Lord always," says St. Paul, "and again I say—Rejoice!" The life of men would be much happier than it is were they, with a lively faith, often to receive holy communion. How sorrowful soever you may be, you will not go to communion and go away without consolation. When our divine Saviour entered the temple, the little children cried out: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and will not you sing a song of praise when Jesus comes into the temple of your heart? O, how much you ought to rejoice! How great a thing it is to be a Christian! "Where is the nation that has its gods so nigh, as our God is with us? What king or emperor is so honored as the faithful Catholic? What angel of heaven so favored as the good communicant?" "Do you not know," says St. Paul, "that you are temples of God?" "Yea, truly, each good Catholic is a true Christopher, that is to say, a bearer of Christ! After communion, he carries in his heart Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God.

"All things are yours," says St. Paul; "all are yours and you are Christ's." "Exult ye who live in Sion!" Why should you make life so hard, and complain of your crosses and trials, and be so impatient in every difficulty? Why should you envy the rich of this world, the great and the honored? Why should you fret when insulted and groan in adversity? Why should you faint at the thought of self-denial and conflict? Are you not a Catholic? Have you not the sweet services of the Church to soothe you and her sacraments to nourish you; her benedictions to strengthen you, and her absolution to cleanse you?

Have you not Mary for your mother, and the angels and saints for your patrons and protectors ; and, above all, have you not Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, for your Father ? Oh ! my soul, rejoice and sing a song unto the Lord.

Why repine, weary soul ; see, the bright sun yet shines  
Upon forest and meadow and mountain and stream,  
And the stars nightly gaze on the flowering vines,  
And the cottage where youth and fair innocence dream.

The bright flowers yet bloom and the merry birds sing,  
And far o'er the blue waters the light breezes play,  
And sweet music's fond tones still to memory bring  
The bright joys that are past, and dear friends far away.

There are still noble souls in this valley of tears,  
There are pure loving hearts that are faithful and brave !  
To repine then and murmur and yield to weak fears  
While brave hearts struggle on—is the part of a slave.

What, though fierce foes unseen lie in wait for thy soul,—  
Thy good angel still watches with tenderest care,  
And the saints ever point to the heavenly goal  
Thou canst reach on the wings of pure love and of prayer.

The blest mother of God from her bright throne on high,  
Amid heaven's pure joys, still remembers to pray  
For her children in exile, who weep here and sigh  
For their home o'er the stars, still so far, far away !

And God's priest is still near thee to heal and to save,  
And thy Saviour still dwells 'neath the light veil of love  
To grant the pure soul every boon she can crave,  
And to lead thee at length to thy true home above.

Alleluia ! Praise the Lord, ye servants of God ; praise ye the name of the Lord henceforth, now and forever. From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is worthy of praise. Who is as the Lord our God, who dwelleth on high and looketh down on the lowly in heaven and on earth ! Raising up the needy from the earth, and lifting the poor out of the dunghill, that he may place them with princes, with the princes of his people. Alleluia ! Bless the Lord, my soul,

and let all that is within me bless his holy name ! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all he has done for thee ; who forgiveth all thy iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion ; who satisfieth all thy desires with good things. He hath not dealt with thee according to thy sins, nor repaid thee according to thy iniquities : for, according to the height of heaven above the earth, he has strengthened his mercy towards them that fear him ; and as far as the West is from the East, so far hath he removed our iniquities from us. As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear him. Bless the Lord, all ye angels ; you that are mighty in strength and execute his Word, hearkening to the voice of his orders. O my soul, bless thou the Lord ! My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. For he that is mighty hath done great things to me : and holy is his name. And his mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear him. He hath shown might in his arm ; he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their hearts ; he hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble ; he hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent away empty ; he hath received Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy. As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever.

Having spoken of the *necessity* of making a thanksgiving after communion, and shown the *manner* in which it may profitably be made, I must now say a few words about the *length of time* which you should devote to your thanksgiving.

The saints desired to spend their whole lifetime in thanksgiving after communion, and felt a kind of reluc-



tance to attend to temporal affairs after having received the body and blood of Jesus Christ. In the "Imitation of Christ," the blessed Thomas à Kempis complains of the necessity of eating, drinking, sleeping and attending to temporal affairs, because they interrupted his converse with the Lord and Master of his heart. We must, however, bear in mind that the saints never allowed their prayers to interfere with the faithful performance of the duties of their state of life. True devotion does not consist in sacrificing work to prayer; but in making prayer a preparation for work, and work a continuation of prayer. Hence, your thanksgiving should not interfere with the duties of your state of life. Father Avila used to spend two hours in thanksgiving after Mass, even when he was very busy. St. Alphonsus advises every one to devote at least half an hour to his thanksgiving, if it be at all possible.

### **15. How Should we spend the day of communion?**

*We should spend it, as much as possible, in recollection, and avoid worldly amusements.*

How much time soever you spend in your thanksgiving, do not imagine that it is at an end when you leave the church. The best thanksgiving is to cease from sin and to remain united with God; your half hour's prayer is only to help you to do this. What a sacrilegious mockery to behold those feet which have borne you to the altar of God, carrying you soon after into evil company; to behold those eyes which, in the morning, gazed upon the immaculate victim, looking soon after upon sinful objects! to see that tongue which has been the throne of God, uttering blasphemous, impure, or calumnious words; to see the heart

which has been united to Infinite Purity and Beauty, defiled by the stain of sin !

You cannot, it is true, remain always in the church, but you can go to your business with a recollected mind. You cannot always keep your prayer-book and beads in your hand, but you can make ejaculatory prayers to God, at every time and in every place ; you can say with a great saint :

“ Now, thou art mine and I am thine !

Ah ! mortal words can ne'er define

My happiness, thus close to be

United, dearest Lord, with thee.

By day and night I'll sing thy praise,

My voice in grateful anthems raise,

To thee, dear Shepherd of my soul,—

Let me ne'er stray from thy control.

This passing life sufficeth not

To thank thee for my happy lot,

So favor'd by thy love to be—

Ah ! Lord, 'twill take eternity.

Had I a thousand lives to lay

In sacrifice each dawning day,

It would, most holy, gracious Lord,

Be for thy love a poor reward.

I cannot love thee as I should,

Nor even as my poor heart would.

For pardon, then, I humbly crave,

And beg thee, still, my soul to save.

Lord Jesus Christ, for thee, I live,

Lord Jesus Christ, I beg thee give

Me grace to die through love of thee,

And be thine own eternally.”

St. Aloysius of Gonzaga used to receive communion once a week ; he was accustomed to spend three days in preparation for communion, and three days in thanksgiving after it. Now, how did he manage this ? Was he all

the time prostrate before the altar, or reading a spiritual book? Not at all; he went wherever obedience called him, quietly performing his duties and keeping his heart united to God. He offered up all his actions to Jesus Christ by way of thanksgiving; and he made now and then some short acts of faith, hope and charity; some acts of self-oblation, or thanksgiving, or supplication. By this means the angelic youth was enabled to walk continually with God; one communion was the preparation for another; thus he constantly advanced in purity of heart and in love for Jesus Christ. Now, every one who has but little time at his disposal, can make such a thanksgiving as this; if not with all the perfection of St. Aloysius, at least with great fruit and consolation. Every one can offer to Jesus the crosses he may meet with during the day, and bear them patiently for the sake of his dear Lord. You can crush the movements of impatience, the thought of vanity, the immodest glance, the word of bitterness, the laugh of folly, the look of pride. You can, for the love of the good Jesus, be just and true, pure and obedient, pious and humble. This is the way to honor and please Jesus Christ. Our Lord did not institute this adorable sacrament to give us a little excitement of devotion, but to make us *holy*. "I have chosen you," said he, "that you should bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." "In this is my Father glorified that you bring forth very much fruit."

Make then, O Christian soul, a good use of the precious moments after communion. You will never fully understand in this world how precious they are. Nothing will cause you more confusion after death than the little account you have made of the Blessed Sacrament. It is related in the Book of Esther, that one night when King

Assuerus could not sleep, he ordered the chronicles of his reign to be read to him. When the reader came to the place where it was related that Mardochai the Jew, had once crushed a wicked plot against the king's life, Assuerus asked, "What reward did Mardochai receive for his fidelity!" "None, at all," answered the courtiers. The king thereupon ordered the long-delayed acknowledgment to be instantly made to his deliverer. He commanded that Mardochai should be carried in procession through the streets, clothed in royal apparel, crowned with a royal crown, and that the herald should cry aloud: "Thus shall he be honored whom the king hath a mind to honor."

To you, also, dear Christian, there will come a sleepless night, when mortal sickness shall tell you that death is near; then you will look back upon your life, and see so many benefits for which you have made no acknowledgment. When you think of your communions you will say, What acknowledgment have I made to my deliverer who has so often saved my life? When the two disciples at Emmaus understood that it was Jesus who had been walking with them, they remembered how their hearts had burned as he conversed with them; so, at the hour of death, you will see how precious were the graces you received, when Jesus, in the holy sacrament, came into your heart. Your communions will then seem to have been the greatest blessings of your life. The world will have disappeared, friends will have deserted you, your whole past life will seem to have been but a dream; but the moments when you received your Saviour will appear to you in their true value. Ah! what regret will you then feel for your unfaithfulness! How earnestly will you desire to live your life over again in order to repair your indevout thanks-



givings! A holy nun, who had suffered very much in this life, appeared after death to one of her sisters in religion. She declared that she would willingly return to the world and undergo once more all the pains she had suffered here on earth, provided she could say but *one Hail Mary*, because by that one prayer her glory and joy would be increased by one degree for all eternity. (P. Michael a St. Catharina. Lib. III. Tract. 16.) Now if the blessed in heaven are willing to do so much for *one Hail Mary*; what would they not do for one communion? And yet that great happiness of increasing their glory is no longer in their power. It is the privilege of us mortals alone to be able to increase our glory by feeding on the flesh of Jesus Christ in the Holy Eucharist. I repeat it, then: Make a great account of your communions. Do now what you will wish to have done at the hour of death. Make the most of every moment of your thanksgiving. Give to Jesus Christ all the honor that you possibly can. You cannot do as Assuerus did. Jesus is great, and you are poor and wretched; you can not give him royal honor—you can but give him the tribute of an humble, loving heart. But even this he is pleased to accept. Offer your heart to him, then, in all sincerity. Converse with him reverently and familiarly whilst you have him in your heart; try to obtain some grace from him which may remain after he has ceased to be sacramentally present with you, and which may enable you to make your next communion better. Thus you will live always united with Jesus, and, by your example and conversation, you will edify your neighbor.

St. Veronica Juliana had, even at the age of three, a great devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Now, as she was not permitted to receive communion, she used to come

very close to her mother after she had communicated, and cling to her dress. One day, her mother noticed the child, and asked her why she thus hung around her, and she replied : "Mother, you taste of Jesus, and you smell of Jesus !" If you, too, dear Christian, are careful to make a good thanksgiving, you will carry with you a sweet odor of sanctity, and angels and good Christians will love to keep you company. You will advance in virtue and happiness. While the tepid and indifferent are bitterly lamenting in purgatory their negligent thanksgivings, or cursing themselves in hell for their folly, you will be blessing in heaven the retired and mortified life which gave you time to love and honor your Saviour. Your most bountiful Lord will reward the little honor you paid him in life by a great and royal recompense. He will do far more for you than Assuerus did for Mardochai. He will cause you to be honored by all the angels and saints in heaven ; he will clothe you in royal attire and "confess your name before his Father," as he himself has promised : "Whosoever shall glorify me, him will I glorify !" (1 Kings ii., 30.)

#### **16. What is a spiritual communion ?**

*A spiritual communion is an ardent desire to receive Jesus in the most holy sacrament, and to embrace him lovingly as if we had actually received him.*

When a soul has once begun to practise frequent communion, she can no longer live without it. Even if she were to communicate every day, it would seem too little. She desires, if possible, to receive our Lord every moment. It is the Blessed Sacrament itself which produces this effect ; for such is the sweetness of that divine

food, that they that eat it still hunger, and they that drink it thirst again. It is our Lord himself who excites this desire in the hearts of the faithful, and he also has provided a means of satisfying this desire. While Jesus was yet on earth he not only imparted many graces to those who were near him, but he also wrought many miracles in behalf of those who were at a distance. In like manner, he now not only bestows many graces upon us when he actually enters our hearts in holy communion, but he also imparts many graces to us by means of spiritual communion. St. Catharine of Sienna, whilst assisting once at the Mass of her Confessor, St. Raymund, felt the most ardent desire to be united to Jesus Christ; but as she had been forbidden to communicate, she did not dare to receive. Our Lord, however, was so moved by the fervor of her love, that he worked a miracle in her favor. At that part of the Mass in which the priest breaks the sacred host into three pieces, the smallest portion disappeared from the altar, flew through the air and rested upon the tongue of St. Catharine. Raymund was much disturbed at the disappearance of the particle; but the saint, after Mass, relieved his anxiety by telling him that our Lord himself had been pleased to give her communion, in reward for her great desire to receive it. Our Saviour displays a similar love towards every one who has a true desire to be united to him. As soon as a soul ardently desires to receive our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, he comes to satisfy her desire, not, indeed, as he did to St. Catharine, under the sacramental species, but by the way of *Spiritual Communion*. This devotion is so full of grace and consolation, that it is of the greatest importance that every one should know how to practise it. I will, therefore, explain it briefly.

Spiritual communion, according to St. Thomas, consists in an ardent desire to receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the most holy sacrament. It is performed by making an act of faith in the presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, then an act of love, and an act of contrition for having offended him. The soul then invites him to come and unite himself to her and make her entirely his own; and lastly, she thanks him, as if she had really received him sacramentally. The spiritual communion may be made in the following manner: "O my Jesus, I firmly believe that thou art truly and really present in the most holy sacrament. I love thee with my whole heart, and because I love thee, I am sorry for having offended thee. I long to possess thee within my soul; but as I cannot now receive thee sacramentally, come at least in spirit into my heart. I unite myself to thee as if thou wert already there; never let me be separated from thee."

Sweet Jesus, hid for love of me,  
How shall I render thanks to thee?  
Ah! would that my poor love could be  
The half of that thou'st shown for me!  
What wondrous act is this of thine,  
To make thyself so wholly mine?  
My food, great God, thou deign'st to be,  
To show how well thou lovest me!  
Lord Jesus, come, I beg of thee,  
And with thy grace, pray, strengthen me.  
For thee alone my heart doth beat—  
Ah! make of it thy mercy-seat.  
E'en as the thirsty stag doth fly  
To running brook, so, Lord, do I  
With longing heart pant after thee;  
Then, come, sweet Jesus, come to me!  
Ah! hasten, Lord, make no delay!  
Come, wed my heart this very day,  
That thus united here below,  
I may not fear eternal woe.



With steadfast faith I cling to thee,  
And press thee, Lord, most tenderly  
Unto my weak and sinful heart,  
Well pleased to claim thee as my part.

The graces which are granted to those who communicate spiritually are so great that they may be likened to those favors which are imparted by an actual reception of the sacrament.

One day, our Lord himself told St. Jane of the Cross, that as often as she communicated spiritually, she received a grace similar to that which she received from the sacramental communion. He also appeared to Sister Paula Maresca, (foundress of the Convent of St. Catharine of Sienna, at Naples,) with two vessels, one of gold and the other of silver, and told her that, in the golden vessel, he preserved her sacramental communions, and, in the silver one, her spiritual communions. The Fathers of the Church go so far as to say, that one who has a very great desire for communion, accompanied with great reverence and humility, may sometimes receive even more graces in a spiritual communion than another who, without these dispositions, should actually receive our Lord in the sacramental species; for, as the Psalmist says: "The Lord hears the desire of the poor, and fills their hearts with good things." The advantages of this mode of communion are very great. To practise it you do not need to go to church, or make a long preparation, or remain fasting; you do not need to ask the permission of your confessor, or to seek a priest to give it to you as you have to do in holy communion. Hence the Venerable Jane of the Cross used to say: "O my Lord, what an excellent mode of receiving without being seen or remarked; without giving trouble to my spiritual Father, or depending on any one

but thee, who, in solitude, dost nourish my soul and speak to my heart."

But the chief advantage of spiritual communion is, that it may be so often repeated. You can receive sacramental communion, at most, but once a day ; but spiritual communion you may receive as often as you please. St. Alphonsus advises every one who wishes to lead a devout life to make spiritual communions at his meditations, at his visits to the Blessed Sacrament, and whenever he hears Mass. But especially he should endeavor to multiply them on the eve of communion, because, as Father Faber, of the Society of Jesus, remarks, they are most powerful means to attain the dispositions necessary for a good communion. The saints were very fond of this devotion.

The Blessed Angela of the Cross, a Dominican nun, was accustomed to make a hundred spiritual communions every day, and a hundred more every night, and she used to say : " If my confessor had not taught me this method of communicating, I could scarcely live." If you ask how she could make so many, I answer with St. Augustine : " Give me a *lover*, and he will understand ; give me a soul that loves nothing but Jesus Christ, and she will know how to do it."

## VII. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE VIRTUES THAT JESUS CHRIST TEACHES US IN THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

### *Poverty.*

Jesus, in the most holy sacrament of the altar, is a master who teaches us every virtue. On earth, he led a life of poverty. On the altar, too, we behold him stripped of everything. It is the same to him whether he be in a city

or in a village ; and he dwells as cheerfully in a ciborium of copper as in one of gold or of silver. In heaven, he has a royal retinue ; but on earth, who keeps him company ? “ I am a man,” he says, “ who sees his poverty.” We, too, see the poverty of Jesus ; but oh ! how slow are we to imitate it ! Our affections are fixed on fine dwellings, good clothing, good attendance ! We dislike to feel the want of anything or to suffer the slightest inconvenience ; just as though the Son of God had said : “ Blessed are the rich, but not the poor ; blessed are those that laugh, but not those that weep.”

### *Humility.*

In the most holy sacrament, Jesus offers himself to honor his heavenly Father. He conceals his divinity and humanity under the appearances of bread and wine ; he assumes a condition far more humiliating than that to which he was reduced in the crib, on the cross, or in the grave. Nay, he exposes himself to the contempt, to the insults of idolators, heretics and bad Catholics. And what is worse, he even submits to the horrible outrage of sacrilegious communion. “ In truth, thou art a hidden God, my God and my Lord ! ”

To imitate this divine humility of Jesus, an humble soul debases herself before God, and acknowledges her absolute dependence upon him. Mean and despicable in her own eyes, she accepts humiliations and contempt with cheerfulness. She is obedient to every one, and regards herself as the lowest, the vilest of creatures. She carefully conceals the graces with which God enriches her ; she always seeks the last place, and flees from the praises of men, content to be praised by God alone.

Oh my Jesus, thou art an humble God, and I am a creature so proud! Thou fleest from honors, and I seek them! Thou seekest humiliations, and I flee from them!

*Patience.*

The body of the Son of God, under the sacramental veils, is, indeed, incapable of suffering; yet the love for sufferings which ever consumed the heart of Jesus, is in no wise diminished. It was to leave us an eternal memorial of his Passion that our Lord instituted this divine sacrament. He commemorates his sufferings, and he is desirous that we, too, should preserve the recollection of them. But though his sacred body is now incapable of suffering, his divine person is still sensible to every insult that is offered to him. Oh! who can enumerate the outrages heaped upon Jesus in this sacrament of his love? Consider the affronts he daily receives from atheists, heretics, superstitious persons, and particularly from bad Catholics. Think of the crimes, the sins of irreverence that are committed in his churches, in his own divine presence! Think of all the bad and sacrilegious communions that are made! Jesus! What admirable lessons of patience dost thou not daily give us in this divine sacrament! But, alas! I profit so little by them! I am so passionate, so impatient! I am unwilling to suffer anything from God or man. I cannot bear anything from my superiors, equals or inferiors. I am a burden to myself, and yet I wish that every one should bear with me. How unreasonable!

Faithful and patient,  
Thou dwellest, dear Jesu,  
So near thy weak children,  
Thy wounded Heart burning  
With love that ne'er sleeps!



Thou watchest, untiring,  
 While grey dawn is breaking,  
 While bright noon is shining,  
 While day-light is waning,

While night's shadow creeps.  
 Fond angels surround thee  
 While men leave thee lonely,—  
 Sweet Jesu, while musing  
 On thy love so wondrous,  
 On men's woeful blindness,  
 The loving heart weeps !  
 Men coldly forget thee  
 While thy love ne'er sleeps.

Dear loving captive !  
 Thou gazest so fondly  
 On thy erring children:  
 Thou weighest ev'ry sorrow,  
 Dost number each pain ;  
 Men thirsting for pleasures,  
 Men seeking for treasures,  
 Men craving for honors,  
 Men thirsting for wisdom,  
 Yet finding all vain !

O, teach us, dear Jesu,  
 From thee to seek wisdom,  
 In thee to find treasures  
 And honors and pleasures ;  
 In thee to find healing  
 For each woe and pain.

O, may our hearts ever  
 In thy love remain !

### *Obedience.*

It was in obedience to his heavenly Father, that the Son of God became man—it was in obedience that his blessed Mother conceived him. He was born while obeying an earthly emperor. He lived under obedience to his parents, and died out of obedience to his heavenly Father, and to his unjust judges. Although he now reigns in heaven, yet he is ever ready to obey man. He obeys all his priests,

the bad as well as the good. He obeys at all hours, by day and by night. He obeys instantly. No sooner are the words of consecration pronounced by the priest, than Jesus is instantly present. He obeys in all places wherever the holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered, whether it be on land or at sea, in a village or in a city, in a stately church or in an humble chapel. He submits to every sort of treatment. He suffers himself to be preserved, to be consumed, to be given to all kinds of persons. He obeys without resistance, without complaint, without showing the least unwillingness. Christian soul ! dost thou obey in this manner ? Dost thou obey all thy superiors, without exception ? Dost thou obey blindly ? Dost thou obey at all times, in all things, always showing that thou art an humble servant of the Lord, ready to follow the commands of thy superiors ?

### *Mortification.*

The whole life of Jesus was one of continual mortification. He is now forever happy in heaven ; nevertheless, he has found a means to teach us by his own example, even to the end of the world, how to mortify our senses, our will, and our judgment. He mortifies his judgment by suffering himself to be disposed of, according to the good pleasure of his priests, to be carried whithersoever they will—to be used for good or bad purposes, just as if he were entirely blind and helpless. He mortifies his will, in bearing the numberless indignities that are offered to his holiness, to his majesty and to his other divine perfections. He mortifies his senses by remaining present in the sacred host as if he were dead. He mortifies his tongue by keeping continually a profound silence. He mortifies his whole body, uniting himself to mere lifeless appearances, and remaining

day and night in the tabernacle as in a prison of love. O my soul ! addicted as thou art to sensual pleasures, what union can there be between thee and the mortified and crucified body of Jesus Christ ? The holy sacrament continually reminds thee of his Passion, and thou holdest suffering in horror ! His life under the sacramental veils is entirely spiritual, and thine is entirely sensual !

*Love of God.*

Jesus teaches us also in this sacrament, how we ought to love God. If we love God truly, we shall do his will in all things : we shall keep his commandments, we shall suffer much for him, and sacrifice ourselves to his honor. This is what Jesus teaches us on our altars. He sacrifices himself daily, nay, hourly, for the honor of his Father and for the good of men. He has thus found out a means to renew his death in a mystical manner, at all times and in all places. All men should offer themselves to God, in order to acknowledge their dependence upon him ; to thank him for his numberless benefits, to ask new blessings from him, and to atone for their sins. Jesus Christ, as the head of the human race, has taken upon himself this obligation, and daily offers himself to pay homage to God for all men, to give thanks to God for all the graces they have received from him, to make satisfaction to his justice so often offended by their grievous crimes, and to obtain for them all the graces necessary for soul and body. O wretch that I am ! A God takes upon himself my sins ; he lays down his life to deliver me from death ; he bears for love of me a thousand insults : and I in return despise and offend him ; I only provoke his anger more and more ; I am unwilling to suffer the least thing for him ; and thus I render his

Passion and death fruitless to me. What ingratitude !  
What hardness of heart ! What cruelty and injustice !

*Love of our Neighbor.*

One of the objects of the Incarnation was to reunite men in the bonds of charity which had been severed by sin. Jesus Christ made this charity an express commandment. He calls it his special commandment. He declares that it is the true mark of his religion. To preserve this charity, he has left us his body and blood under the appearances of bread and wine, in order that, partaking of one bread, we may also be one body and one soul. And the more to ensure the practice of charity among men, he has made our natural desire for happiness the motive for loving one another. He has commanded us to partake of his body and blood, under pain of eternal damnation ; and the indispensable condition to our receiving this heavenly food is charity. But, not content with all this, he continually gives us in the Blessed Sacrament most persuasive lessons of charity. While other shepherds clothe themselves with the wool of their flocks, and feed on their flesh, Jesus Christ, the good Shepherd, strips himself, in order to clothe us ; he even gives us his flesh and blood for our food ; and when a devout soul, transported at a favor so divine, asks how she may repay so great a benefit, he replies : “ Do good to your fellow-men, and I will hold you discharged of all your debts to me. Whatsoever you do to them I will count it as done to me.” “ Does it seem hard to you,” he says, “ to love your neighbor ? Consider, then, how I have loved you. Does it seem hard to you *to give and to forgive* ? Then think whether you are ever required to give anything as precious as the food which I give to you.



Think whether you have ever to suffer as many affronts as I have suffered for your sake in this sacrament of love ! Is the disciple greater than his master, or the servant above his lord ? Go, then, and do to others what I have done to you." O Jesus ! Thou hast conquered. We give our hearts to thee that thou mayst make them humble and gentle. O thou, the Well-Beloved of the Father, who comest on earth and dwellest in our tabernacles, in order to impart to men thy divine spirit of charity, take from us all selfishness and hardness of heart, and teach us how to love one another.

#### JESUS IN THE BLESSED SACRAMENT, OUR TRUE FRIEND.

Our life is but a succession of rudely-broken or worn-out friendships. Youth, with its romance, with its golden visions, its bloom of young desire and purple light of love—youth passes away ; and with it many a beautiful, noble soul whom we cherished and loved as life itself. These friends of youth may not have been faithless to us nor we to them, but an inexorable current drifts them away from us, and we float upon the sea of life never perhaps to meet them again in this wide world.

The bright fresh morning of youth passes away, and the glaring, dusty, toilsome noon of life comes on. This is the season of withering suspicions, chilling misunderstandings, the season of cruel reality. The idols which we loved and worshipped are broken. Aye ! Even those whom we looked upon as saints, have broken down when our imperfections leaned upon them. Our staff became a hollow, broken, worthless reed ; but in breaking, it left behind a poisoned, rankling wound which will not heal. We feel at last—

“Like one who treads alone  
Some banquet-hall deserted,—  
The lights are fled,  
The garlands dead  
And all but he departed.”

At last, the chill twilight of old age creeps on apace, and we are left to the care of strangers—strange faces and strange hands we knew not in our youth—left a burden to others, and often, too, a burden to ourselves.

But in all these sad and weary changes, we have one true friend; it is Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament. He knows no change. He outlives all other friends. He never for a moment doubts our sincerity. He never grows weary of our faults. He never abandons us, or thinks he has done too much for us. He is never imperious, or harsh, or exacting. Jesus is a true, loving friend. He is patient with us even when we are weary of ourselves. He believes in us. He hopes the best things from us. He forgives us again and again, and always stands by us even when others give up our cause as hopeless. We are often misjudged and misunderstood even by our best friends. Jesus alone knows and understands us as we really are, and never misjudges us.

Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is a faithful friend. You open your heart to a friend: you tell him your inmost thoughts and desires; you confide in him as a second self, and, lo! all at once you find your confidence betrayed. You are held up to the scorn and ridicule of a cold, heartless world. Jesus alone is faithful. He will never betray us. Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament is an all-powerful friend. You will find many to pity you, to advise you and even blame you in your misfortunes; but how few—how very few—will really help you! How few will make

even a slight sacrifice for your sake ! Jesus alone is willing and able to help you. He is all-powerful. He gave his life for you ; he offers you all that he has—all that he is. Be faithful, then, to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament ; do the will of his heavenly Father, and you are, according to his declaration, “ his brother, and sister and mother.” Praised forever be Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament !

When youth's cherished hopes and bright dreams have all flown,  
When dearest friends leave me to wander alone,  
When floating a leaf on this life's dreary sea,—  
Sweet Jesu, my lonely heart turns then to thee :

Fond rest of the weary, my heart turns to thee !  
Dear friend, ever faithful, my heart turns to thee !

When age comes apace with its doubts and its fears,  
When rosy clouds melt into thick, blinding tears,  
When the flow'rs o'er life's pathway once smilingly strown  
Have faded and left cruel thorns here alone ;

Sweet Jesu, my lonely heart turns then to thee,  
Dear friend, ever faithful, my heart turns to thee !

When life seems a desert all pathless and drear,  
No wide-spreading palm-tree, no cooling spring near,—  
When earth seems of iron and brazen the sky,  
When faint and athirst my sad heart longs to die,

Sweet Jesu, my lonely heart turns then to thee,  
Dear friend, ever faithful, my heart turns to thee !

Beneath love's own veil thou dost dwell night and day,  
So loving, so patient, so faithful alway.  
All else fades : the bright stars shall fall from the skies,—  
Thy love, dearest Jesu, alone never dies.

Sweet Jesu, my lonely heart turns then to thee,  
Dear friend, ever faithful, my heart turns to thee !

### THE SACRAMENT OF PENANCE.

A PIOUS missionary was one day travelling in one of the wildest regions of North America. He stopped at the principal villages, and often found in them savages whom grace brought to him from a considerable distance. He instructed them, and baptized those whom he thought well-disposed, and sufficiently instructed. On one occasion, an Indian full of fervor presented himself. As soon as he was well-instructed the missionary baptized him and gave him holy communion.

A year after, the missionary returned to the place where this Indian convert dwelt. As soon as the latter was aware of the missionary's arrival, he ran to throw himself at his feet. He knew not how to express his joy at seeing again him who had begotten him to Jesus Christ. He entreated the father to grant him once more the happiness he enjoyed the year before. "Of what happiness do you speak?" asked the missionary. "Ah! my father, do you not know? The happiness of receiving the body of my God?" "Most willingly, my child; but first you must go to confession. Have you examined your conscience well?" "Father, I examined it every day, as you charged me to do last year." "In that case, kneel down, and declare to me the faults into which you may have fallen



since your baptism." "What faults, father?" "Why the grave faults you may have wilfully committed against the commandments of God and the Church." "Grave faults?" answered the Indian, amazed. "Can any one offend God after he is baptized, and especially after having received communion? Is there anywhere a Christian capable of such ingratitude?" Saying these words, he burst into tears, and the missionary, too, could not help weeping as he blessed God for having prepared, even in the remotest places, worshippers who may indeed be called worshippers in spirit and in truth. (Debussi, *Nouv. Mois de Marie*, 135.)

After having become by baptism children of God and tabernacles of the Holy Ghost, we should cease to offend Almighty God. After the pardon granted in baptism, we should by right sin no more. What a pleasing sight to behold the child grow up to manhood and old age, and bear unsullied with him to heaven the white robe of his first innocence! Yet how small is the number of those happy Christians who never commit a mortal sin! Such is the weakness, such is the wretchedness, of human nature! Alas! what a misfortune for a soul to lose her baptismal innocence. The purity of that first innocence is so spotless that all other purity seems tarnished, as it were, in comparison with it.

Well may we exclaim when gazing on a soul which has lost the brightness of her baptismal innocence:

Ah me! how sadly fallen,  
Thy soul, once brighter far,  
In all its sinless beauty,  
Than radiant morning star!  
Ah, now thy beauty's fled!

Once in God's hallowed garden  
 No fairer flow'r did bloom,  
 Than thy pure soul whose virtues  
 Shed round a sweet perfume ;  
 Ah, now the flow'r lies dead !  
 Lost ! lost ! perchance forever !  
 Thy wearied conscience sleeps,  
 The demon gloats now proudly,  
 Thy loving angel weeps !  
 Pure thoughts no more inspire !  
 Ah God ! what bitter anguish  
 That sad word "*once*" reveals !  
 The bliss that might have crowned thee,  
 The wound that never heals,  
 The worm, the quenchless fire !  
 Weep not the fondly loved ones  
 Who sleep in childhood's prime ;  
 The good and pure die never—  
 They reign in brighter clime  
 'Mid heaven's fadeless day !  
 But weep the blind who smiling  
 Tread near the dread abyss,  
 Whose thoughts and hopes soar never  
 To heaven's pure hallowed bliss.  
 Aye, weep for these and pray !

For him, who, after baptism, has fallen into mortal sin, there can be no question of greater importance than this: Has God given us the means to obtain the pardon of those sins which we have committed after baptism ?

If we consider that God has given us so many means of restoring our bodily health, we must naturally expect that he has also given us, in his Church, the means of recovering our spiritual health, since the soul is so much more precious than the body. That we may not have the least doubt on the subject, the holy apostles have taught us to add to the words of the Creed—"I believe in the holy, Catholic Church—" the consoling words: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins."

Now the means which Christ has instituted to forgive our sins is the *Sacrament of Penance*. This sacrament is the blessed road on which Almighty God meets the repentant sinner, folds him in his arms and exchanges his soiled garments for the snow-white robe of innocence.

### **1. What is the Sacrament of Penance ?**

*Penance is a sacrament by which the sins committed after baptism are forgiven.*

The word "penance" has different meanings. It means, first, a moral virtue which leads us to hate and avoid sin. In this sense, penance has at all times been absolutely necessary for the forgiveness of actual sin.

In the second place, penance means the penalty which we endure in punishment of past sin. In this sense a Christian may submit to the reverses of this life, or perform acts of mortification as a penance for his sins.

In the third place, the word "penance" means a sacrament of the New Law by which the sins committed after baptism are forgiven. It is in this sense that we now consider it. Penance is a true sacrament, for it has all the conditions necessary to make it a sacrament, viz.: *the outward sign*, which consists in the acts of the penitent joined to the words of absolution pronounced by the priest. The words of absolution are the form of this sacrament. The acts of the penitent are contrition, confession and satisfaction. According to the Council of Trent these acts are "as it were, the matter of the Sacrament of Penance." There is a difference between the matter of this sacrament and that of the other sacraments. In the latter the outward or sensible sign, which we call matter, is something material in its nature: as, for instance, water

in baptism, and chrism in confirmation. But in the Sacrament of Penance the acts of the penitent take the place of the matter, and therefore are called "the matter, as it were, of this sacrament!" In another and different sense, the sins of the penitent are also said to be the matter of the Sacrament of Penance, in the same manner as wood or coal is called the matter of fire. For as fire burns and consumes the wood or coal, so the acts of the penitent—contrition, confession and satisfaction—act upon and destroy sin.

In this latter sense all mortal sins committed after baptism, and not already properly confessed and forgiven, are the necessary matter of the Sacrament of Penance; for, in the ordinary providence of God, they are not forgiven in any other way.

Venial sins, or mortal sins already forgiven, are sufficient matter for the reception of this sacrament. In other words, it is not necessary to confess venial sins, or to repeat the confession of mortal sins which have been forgiven. However, the confession of these sins, accompanied with the proper disposition, is sufficient to enable us to receive the grace of the sacrament.

We should bear in mind there is, in the second place, the permanent institution of Jesus Christ, as is clear from the words addressed to his apostles: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins ye shall retain, they are retained." These words also imply the *inward grace* of this sacrament, that is, the remission of sin, which cannot take place except by the inward grace bestowed by the absolution of the priest.

Penance is a "sacrament by which the sins committed



after baptism are forgiven." By this sacrament the sins committed before baptism are not forgiven, because it is by the sacrament of baptism that not only original sin, but also all the other actual sins, committed before baptism, are forgiven. By penance, only the sins committed after baptism, are remitted. The reason is, because the Church cannot administer the Sacrament of Penance to any one who has not yet become her child by baptism. As baptism, then, is necessary to cleanse us from original sin, so, in like manner, is the Sacrament of Penance necessary to blot out the sins committed after baptism. As no one can enter the kingdom of heaven who has not received holy baptism either in reality or desire, so no one can be saved when he has lost his baptismal innocence, without the actual reception of the Sacrament of Penance, or, if that be impossible, at least the implicit desire of this sacrament, joined to perfect contrition.

Baptism and penance have both been instituted for the remission of sin ; still they are two distinct sacraments. Baptism is intended for the remission of original sin and of the actual sins committed before its reception. Penance is the divinely-appointed means of blotting out the sins committed after baptism. Baptism, if received worthily, remits the guilt as well as the whole punishment due to sin. Penance takes away the guilt and the eternal punishment, but generally leaves a debt of temporal punishment. Of this we shall speak more fully when treating of satisfaction. He who dies immediately after baptism goes straight to heaven. He who dies immediately after receiving the Sacrament of Penance has often to go to Purgatory, to pay there the debt of temporal punishment which may still remain. In baptism our sins are more easily forgiven

than in the Sacrament of Penance, and less is required on the part of the recipient than in the Sacrament of Penance. On this account, penance is sometimes called a laborious baptism.

## 2. When did Christ institute this Sacrament ?

*When he said to the apostles : Receive ye the Holy Ghost ; whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them ; and whose sins you shall retain they are retained."* (John xx., 22, 23.)

It is well to remember that this power of forgiving sins was given by God the Father to Jesus Christ, even as man. Jesus himself said to his apostles : All power is given to me in heaven and on earth." (Matt. xviii., 18.) By saying "all power in heaven and on earth is given to me," he plainly gives us to understand that he had also received from his heavenly Father the power of forgiving sins ; and that he had this same power even as man, is clearly implied in the words "is given to me." Had our Saviour, when he uttered this, considered himself as God, he could not have said "is given to me," because as God he already had this power. He spoke as man, then, when he said "all power is given to me," and as man he could and did receive from his heavenly Father the power of forgiving sins. He even proved this by a miracle when some Scribes called this power of his in question. When the people brought to our Lord a man sick of the palsy, he said to the sick man : "Son, be of good heart, thy sins are forgiven thee." Then some of the Scribes said within themselves, "He blasphemeth," and added, as Protestants do at the present day, "that God alone can forgive sins." But wishing to show them that, even as man,

he had received from his heavenly Father the power to forgive sins, our divine Saviour wrought a great miracle. He said: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins, then he saith to the man sick of the palsy: 'Arise, take up thy bed and go into thy house;' and he arose and went into his house, and the multitude seeing it feared and glorified God, who had given such power to men." (Matt. ix., 3.)

Now the power which Jesus Christ, as man, had, was again delegated by him to other men: that is, to St. Peter and the rest of the apostles. This our Lord did in the most solemn manner, on the very day of his resurrection. On Easter Sunday night the apostles were assembled in the supper-room in Jerusalem. They had the doors and windows firmly barred and bolted, for fear the Jews might break in and drag them to prison. Suddenly, Jesus himself stood among them, and saluted them with the sweet words, "Peace be with you." The apostles were afraid, for they thought they saw a ghost. Jesus encouraged them and bade them touch him: "See my hands and feet," he said, "it is I, myself; feel and see; a ghost has not flesh and bones as I have." The apostles trembled with joy and wonder, but still hesitated. Jesus told them to give him something to eat, and he ate with them, and then they saw clearly that he was risen from the dead. Our divine Saviour now said to them: "Peace be with you. As the Father hath sent me, so I also send you;" (John xx., 21.) that is, with the same powers with which I, as man, am sent by my Father, I also send you as my delegates, as the pastors of my Church. And, that there might not be the least doubt that, in these words of his, he included the power of forgiving sins,—nay, to show, in especial manner,

that this power was included, he immediately breathed upon the apostles, and said to them: "Receive ye the Holy Ghost: whose sins ye shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained. (John xx., 22.) Here, in the clearest terms, Jesus Christ gives his apostles the power of forgiving sins, so that whenever they exercised this power here on earth by absolving a repentant sinner, their absolution was ratified in heaven, and the sins of the penitent were actually forgiven.

Mark well the words: "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them." No man who really loves the truth can find any other meaning in these words than their plain and natural meaning. These words may be examined in any grammar or dictionary of the English language, in the Syro-Chaldaic, the very language our Saviour spoke,—in fact, in any language whatever; and, if we are sincere, we shall find no other meaning in them than their natural and obvious meaning: "Whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven them." What plainer words could our Saviour have used, what other words could we ourselves use, to express the fact that the apostles really received the power of forgiving sins?

Suppose the emperor of Russia were to send an ambassador to this country, and, giving him full power to act as plenipotentiary, would say to him: "Whatsoever conditions you agree to, I also agree to them; and whatsoever conditions you reject, I also reject them." Would not such language be clear and explicit enough? Would not every one see that this ambassador was invested with the same power as the emperor himself? Now, this is precisely the language of our divine Saviour to his apostles: "Whatsoever sins you forgive, I also forgive them; and



whatsoever sins you refuse to forgive, I also refuse to forgive them."

When God formed the first man out of the slime of the earth, he breathed into his face the breath of life, and, that instant, man became a living soul, the living image of God. Now, once more God breathes upon his apostles the breath of life, and, that very instant, they become, not merely images of God, for that they are already, but really Gods, as it were, having all power in heaven and on earth. "As the living Father hath sent me, so do I also send you." The heavenly Father had sent Jesus Christ to forgive sins, and to transmit this power to others; and Jesus, in like manner, sends his apostles with the power to forgive sins, and to transmit this power to their successors.

### **3. What must we do in order to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily?**

*We must: 1, carefully examine our conscience; 2, have true contrition or sorrow, with a firm purpose of amendment; 3, confess our sins, and receive absolution; 4, render satisfaction.*

The Fathers of the Council of Trent teach that the acts of contrition, confession, and satisfaction are required of the penitent, by the appointment of God, for the integrity of the sacrament and the perfect forgiveness of sins, and that, on this account, they are called essential parts of penance. It will be necessary, then, to explain each of these parts separately. But as we cannot be truly sorry for our sins, much less confess them, without having a knowledge of them, it will, above all, be necessary to speak of the examen of conscience.

## EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE.

**1. What is to "examine our conscience"?**

*It is to try to remember how often we have sinned in thought, word and deed, against the commandments of God and of the Church.*

In examining our conscience we should be perfectly sincere, and guard against a false conscience. The following rules will be of much service to us: First, we should endeavor to forget, for the moment, that we are judging our own case; we should look at our actions as if we were examining the doings of another. We should ask ourselves what would we think of one who had done the same things that we have done. If we can fairly acquit him of blame, we may rest satisfied; but we must condemn in ourselves what we should condemn in our neighbor.

Secondly, if an enemy had watched our conduct, understood our motives, and wished to destroy our character, what would he be most likely to blame? what actions would he most strongly condemn? what actions would cause us most shame if made public? The answers to these questions would show us our weak points, and tell us what we ought to examine.

Thirdly, there is, however, a much higher standard by which we ought to judge ourselves. When examining our conscience, let us imagine that we are at the point of death; that we must, in a few moments, appear before the eternal Judge to give an account of our lives. How will our past life appear at that awful moment? What will then alarm us most? What will we then wish undone or unsaid? Of what faults will we then wish to repent? What doubts will we wish to clear up, before leaving this

world? Those who always prepare for confession as if they were at the point of death, can hardly fail to make a good preparation. Now to examine our conscience is to consider attentively and diligently what we have done against God, against our neighbor, and against ourselves in thought, word, and deed; examining ourselves on the commandments of God and of his Church, and on the duties of our state of life. Every person is bound to *know* the duties of his state of life: whoever, therefore, is grossly ignorant of them, must make that ignorance a matter of confession; and he must resolve, moreover, to acquire a sufficient knowledge of his duties. Ignorance of our duties cannot excuse us when that ignorance proceeds from our own wilful neglect.

In order to be able to remember our sins, we may either use the table of sins found in our prayer-books, or we may go through the circumstances of each day, considering the occupations in which we have been engaged, the places which we have frequented, the persons whom we have seen, and the duties which we have had to perform. We should then ask ourselves whether we have, since our last confession, wilfully done anything that our conscience condemned, or omitted anything that conscience commanded.

“Good Christians,” says St. Alphonsus, “make an examen of conscience every night.” A certain devout monk, when at the point of death, was told by his superior to prepare for confession. “Blessed be God,” said he, “I have, for these thirty years, made an examination of conscience every night, and I always made my confession as if I were at the point of death.”

**2. If we cannot remember how many times we have committed each sin, what must we do ?**

*We must try to remember how many times we committed each sin every day, or every week, or every month, or every year.*

In examining our conscience we must try to remember our sins, not only in general, but also in particular: that is, we must try to remember how many times we committed each sin. The reason is because we are obliged to confess our sins, not only in general, but also the number of times we have committed them. Now, to find out the number we must ask ourselves how many times we committed each sin every day, or every week, or every month, or every year. There are many Christians who are not careful in examining their conscience, especially in finding out the number of their mortal sins. They forget many mortal sins, and afterwards they merely confess the sins which they remember at the moment of confession. Thus it often happens that they do not confess half their sins. "Confessions made in this manner," says St. Alphonsus, "are fruitless."

The historian, Nicius Erithraeus, relates that a young man, who had usually made his confession in this careless manner, sent for a priest at the hour of death. But before the priest arrived, a devil came and showed the young man a long list of sins which he had omitted in his confessions through want of care in examining his conscience. The unhappy young man despaired of salvation and died without having made his confession.

**3. What faults are to be avoided, in the examination of conscience ?**

*We should be neither too hasty and superficial, nor too scrupulous in making it.*



“In examining our conscience,” says St. Alphonsus, “we should avoid carelessness on the one hand and too much anxiety on the other.” The general rule is to use that amount of care and diligence which a person of ordinary prudence generally employs in any matter of importance. If some one had unjustly taken possession of your property, what care and diligence would you not employ in procuring witnesses, and in proving your right to the property? Now, apply this to your preparation for confession: sin has robbed you of sanctifying grace, and of your title to the kingdom of heaven: and absolution, preceded by a good confession, is the judicial act by which you are to recover both. What care and diligence, therefore, ought you not to employ in your preparation for confession, which is an affair of so much importance?

The length of time to be devoted to your examination of conscience, depends very much on the period which has elapsed since your last confession, and on the kind of life which you have led. No general rule can, therefore, be given, as so much depends on circumstances. Very little time is sufficient for persons of a tender conscience, who go *frequently* to confession. Such persons should be satisfied with the time pointed out for them by their director.

He who leads a quiet life, and has but few duties to fulfil, needs less time than one who has lived in habits of sin, who has been engaged in various kinds of transactions and employments, and who confesses but seldom. The latter should enter seriously into himself, and diligently strive to recollect the *places* where he has been, the *persons* with whom he has had intercourse, and the *employments* or *pursuits* in which he has been engaged since his last confession. Such recollections will assist him in bringing

to mind the sins he may have committed in thought, word, and deed.

When we have made a diligent examination, according to the circumstances of the case, we should rest satisfied, and proceed to the other parts of our preparation; for even should we forget a mortal sin, that sin is pardoned equally with the rest. All we have to do, in such a case, is to mention that sin in our next confession, if we remember it. Ordinary diligence is required in examining our conscience, but there are some who are not satisfied with ordinary care; and, whilst some examine themselves too little, these examine themselves too much. These are scrupulous persons. They are always examining their conscience, and are never satisfied. Such persons often neglect to make acts of true sorrow for their sins as well as a firm purpose of amendment. Moreover, their scruples fill them with such absurd fears that to go to confession appears to them like going to martyrdom. The scrupulous, then, when told by the confessor to make no further examination should be silent and obey their confessor. St. Philip Neri used to say: "Let all who wish to become holy obey their confessor, who takes the place of God. He who obeys him may be sure that he will not have to render to God an account of what he has done through obedience." "Not to believe the confessor," says the John of the Cross, "is pride and want of faith" in the words of Christ: "He that heareth you heareth me."

"As to those, who often receive the sacraments, it is not necessary for them," says St. Alphonsus, "to harass their mind in trying to find out all the minute circumstances of their venial sins. I would rather see such persons careful to discover the causes and roots of their attachments and

tepidity. Many of these persons go to confession with their head full of things which they heard and saw, and thus always tell the same tale, and recite the same faults without sorrow and without any thought of amendment. For spiritual souls who go frequently to confession and guard against wilful venial sins, it is not necessary to spend a long time in the examination of conscience. As to grievous sins, they need not examine their conscience; for, had they committed any mortal sin, they would know it without examination. As to venial sins, had they been fully deliberate, they, too, by the reproaches of conscience, would make themselves known to the soul. Besides, as there is no obligation of confessing all our venial faults, we are not obliged to make a strict search after them; and much less after the number, the circumstances, the manner, or the cause of them. It is enough to confess those which are most hurtful and most opposed to perfection, and to tell the rest in general terms. 'Be not troubled,' says St. Francis de Sales, 'if you do not remember all your little faults in confession. For, as you often fall without perceiving it, so you also often rise without perceiving it,' that is, you rise from your falls by the acts of love, or by other good works which you are accustomed to perform."

#### **4. How do we begin the examination of conscience?**

*By asking the Holy Ghost to give us the grace to know our sins and to make a good confession.*

The good dispositions of the heart, which are necessary for a good confession, are especial gifts of the Holy Ghost. We should, therefore, most earnestly beg of God to give us this grace; we should especially ask of him light and grace to know our sins, their number and grievousness; for

we are too apt to be blind to our own faults. Self-love and our passions naturally prejudice our reason, and the false maxims of the world assist in deluding us. Hence we should pray with St. Augustine: "Lord, give me grace to know thee, and give me grace to *know myself*." Our natural forgetfulness is another reason why we should, like holy Job, pray earnestly for light, to enable us to know the true state of our conscience: "How many," he says, "are mine iniquities and sins? Make me know my crimes and offenses." (Job xiii., 23.) My God, help me to make a good confession, to know my sins, and to be truly sorry for them. Keep me from sin, for the time to come. Help me to confess all my sins sincerely and humbly, etc.

#### CONTRITION.

##### **1. What is contrition, or sorrow?**

*It is a hatred and detestation of sin committed, joined with a firm purpose of amendment.*

More than eighteen centuries have passed since the Son of God accomplished the great work of redemption by his bitter Passion and death. As the time of his sufferings drew nigh, Jesus entered Jerusalem with his disciples. The people of the city, on learning of his approach, hastened forth to meet him. In their hands, they bore branches of the palm and the olive; they spread their garments on the ground before Jesus; they filled the air with loud hosannas and with sweet hymns of praise and gladness. But, strange to say, amidst the music and rejoicing, amidst the glory of his triumphant entry, Jesus is sad: Jesus weeps and sobs aloud as if his heart would break. This is indeed strange beyond expression. Was Jesus perhaps sad



because he disliked rejoicing ? Oh ! no ; for we see him often present at the banquets of the Pharisees. We see him present at the merry wedding-feast of Cana, where, in order to increase the gaiety, he works an unheard-of miracle, and changes water into wine. Jesus was no enemy of innocent rejoicing. Why, then, does he weep amidst the universal joy of his triumphant entry into Jerusalem ? Our Lord himself tells us the cause of his tears. He protests that he weeps because Jerusalem does not know him. “ O Jerusalem, didst thou but know, this day, the things that are for thy peace ; but now they are hidden from thine eyes.” (Luke xix.) What can this mean ? Why, the whole city can scarce contain itself for joy. No sound is heard save that of praise and gladness. “ Blessed be the king who cometh in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory on high.” (Luke xix.) Such is the triumphant hymn with which the people greet Jesus ; and yet Jesus weeps and laments because the city does not know him ! “ Oh ! didst thou but know and understand this day.”

Such was the welcome which Jesus received from the Jewish people ; such, too, is the welcome which he receives, at the present day, from so many of his own Christian people. He is welcomed by all, he is known but to few. Like the Jewish people, many Christians welcome Jesus ; they hasten to the sacraments with every outward mark of devotion ; but like the Jews, too, though they welcome Jesus, though they receive Jesus, they do not know or care to know Jesus. In spite of the solemnity of the season, in spite of the outward marks of devotion, so many Christians of the present day often approach the sacraments with such little preparation, with such unworthy dispositions, that,

instead of being a joy and an honor to Jesus, they rather fill his heart with sadness. They load him with insult.

Let us return to Jerusalem, a few days after the triumphant entry of our Saviour. Behold this very same Jewish people. They are following an unhappy criminal who is being led to death. Ask them who this criminal is, and they will tell you, "It is Jesus of Nazareth." What! Jesus of Nazareth? Is it possible? Is not this the same Jesus who was welcomed, only a few days ago, with such unparalleled honors? Is not this the same people who, but a few days ago, cried out, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord;" and now their hoarse cry rings wildly through the air, "Crucify him! crucify him!" Yes, it is the very same Jesus; it is the very same people. No wonder, then, that Jesus wept on the day of his triumphant entry. No wonder that he complained that this people did not know him. O ungrateful people! could you not dishonor Jesus by a shameful death, without first honoring him with such a glorious triumph?

But let us turn to ourselves. Were a stranger to pass through the city at the season of Lent, were he to see the churches so well filled, and the confessionals so crowded with penitents, what a good opinion would he form of the Catholics of the place! Wherever we turn we behold eyes filled with tears, countenances stamped with contrition—everywhere signs of sincere devotion. Here, truly, he would say, Jesus is honored; here he rejoices, here he celebrates a glorious triumph. Yes; but return here in two months, in two weeks even, and the same penitent faces will be seen at parties, balls, theatres and in the drinking-saloons. At the gambling-table you will see these very same hands; in the families, among relations and neighbors,

you will see the very same quarrels; in the stores, you will see the same false weights, the same fraud; the old curses and blasphemies will be heard in the streets and public places. This is indeed a change of scene, and this change of scene is renewed every Easter.

Now whence comes this fickleness? The Jewish people, in the impulse of the moment, hastened forth to meet Jesus without well knowing whom they welcomed. So, in like manner, many Christians, carried away by the devotion of the season, hasten to welcome Jesus without knowing him; they hasten to be reconciled to Jesus without understanding well whom it is they have offended. The prophet bitterly bewails such blindness: "There is not one who does penance for his sins, not one who asks himself seriously, What have I done?" (Jer. viii.) This is the origin of the sad inconstancy of the greater part of Christians. Did they but fully understand the greatness of their sins, they would also truly repent of them. But such is, unhappily, not the case. They have no true contrition, and, consequently, they soon fall again and again into the very same sins that they but a short time before confessed.

Now, it is of faith, that true sorrow for our sins is absolutely necessary for salvation; for, if there is no true sorrow, there can be no pardon. The examen of conscience is necessary; but were we to spend a whole year in examining our conscience, unless we have sincere sorrow or contrition, we could not obtain pardon.

Confession is necessary; but it may happen that we forget a sin, or cannot find a confessor, or that we cannot speak the language of the priest, or that we have lost our speech. In such cases it will be sufficient if we make

an act of perfect contrition, with the sincere resolution to confess our sins as soon as possible. But, were we to confess all our sins with even the minutest accompanying circumstances, if we have no contrition we could not obtain pardon.

Satisfaction is necessary ; but it is sometimes impossible. A person, for instance, may be too poor to make restitution ; in that case it will suffice if he have the sincere desire to restore as soon as possible. But though he were to restore everything and had not true sorrow, he could not receive forgiveness.

Absolution is necessary ; but sometimes there is no priest at hand. In such a case, if we make an act of perfect contrition, and have the sincere desire to confess as soon as possible, we shall be forgiven ; but were we to be absolved by all the bishops and priests of the Church, even by the Pope himself, and had not true sorrow, we could not receive forgiveness.

Water is necessary for baptism ; but, when water cannot be had, the want may be supplied by the baptism of desire, or by the baptism of blood ; but, if contrition is wanting, its lack cannot be supplied by anything whatever. No contrition—no pardon !

So important, so necessary is contrition that, though a sinner were guilty of all the crimes that ever have been or ever will be committed—if he has but true contrition, he can and ought to be absolved ; while, on the contrary, he who has only committed a slight venial sin—if he has no contrition, cannot and should not receive absolution.

Contrition, being an essential part of the Sacrament of Penance, is, in all cases, as necessary for its valid reception as water is for baptism. If a person were to use wine



instead of water in baptizing a child, there would be no sacrament ; and, consequently, the original sin in which the child was born would not be washed away. In like manner, if we receive the Sacrament of Penance without true contrition, our sins are not forgiven. This sorrow for sin, then, is the most important part of our preparation for the Sacrament of Penance.

## 2. When, then, is contrition good ?

*Contrition, or sorrow, to be good, must be : 1, interior, from the heart or will : 2, sovereign, or sorrow above all other sorrow ; 3, universal, or sorrow at least for all our mortal sins ; 4, supernatural, or sorrow for having offended God, joined with the hope of pardon.*

God will not pardon without contrition. "It is," as Tertullian says, "the only price for which God pardons." God cannot pardon without contrition, for to be without sorrow for an offence is to give new and continued offence.

1. What, then, is contrition ? Contrition is a hatred and detestation of sin, joined with a firm purpose of amendment. This contrition, to be good, must proceed from the heart or will. "Be converted to me," says the Lord, "with all your heart in weeping and in mourning, and rend your hearts. . . and turn to the Lord, your God." (Joel ii., 12, 13.) Every sin and vice, as our dear Saviour himself declares, proceeds from the heart, and has its seat in the heart. When we sin, it is, properly speaking, not our eyes, or ears, or tongue, that sins ; it is the soul, animating our body, that sins. The soul uses the senses as the instruments of sin. It is the soul, the will, that sins, and consequently it is the soul, the will, that must repent. Our contrition, then, must necessarily be interior and heartfelt.

The very word contrition itself implies its true nature. Contrition is derived from the Latin word "conterere," which means to bruise, to crush, to break. To have true, heartfelt contrition, therefore, means to be heartbroken for having offended our dear Lord.

Now, if sincere, heartfelt contrition is so necessary, what are we to think of those penitents who confess their sins with such cool indifference, that one might be tempted to suppose they had come merely to relate some interesting anecdote? If the priest tells them to make an act of contrition, he must often observe, to his grief, that they do not even seem to know what that means. Many of them do not even know what contrition is, or what it has to do with confession. The greater part, however, know, indeed, how to make an act of contrition; but, unfortunately, even their contrition consists generally in striking their breast a few times, and in muttering a certain formula which they learned in their childhood. If the priest asks such a penitent whether he is sorry for his sins, the answer is, of course, "yes"; but it is a "yes" that evidently does not come from the heart—it is a "yes" that is just about equivalent to "no."

It is not so much the number and enormity of the sins he has to hear that fill the priest with pain and anxiety. It is, rather, the want of disposition, of true contrition in the penitent, that often causes him the most cruel martyrdom.

"Those," says St. Alphonsus, "who go often to confession, and detest even venial faults, should banish all doubts as to the sincerity of their sorrow. Some are troubled because they do not feel any sorrow. They wish to shed tears and to feel a tender sorrow every time they go to confession; and, as with all their efforts, they are unable

to excite this tender sorrow, they feel always uneasy about their confessions. Now, this is a mistake. True sorrow does not consist in feeling, but in the earnest will to give up sin. Hence, St. Thomas Aquinas says, that the sorrow necessary for confession consists in a hatred of sin; and this sorrow is not in the sensitive part of the soul, but in the will. The feeling of sorrow we are not always able to produce, because the inferior part of the soul does not always follow and obey the superior part. Be careful, therefore, not to make any unnatural efforts to excite in your heart a feeling of sorrow. Remember that the best interior acts are those which we perform with the least violence and with the greatest sweetness. The Holy Ghost orders all things sweetly and peacefully! (Wisd. viii., 1.) Hence, the holy penitent Ezechias said of the sorrow which he felt for his sins: 'Behold, in peace is my bitterness most bitter.' (Isaias, 38.) He felt great sorrow, but it was accompanied with peace. When you prepare for confession, ask, first, of Jesus and Mary, a true sorrow for your sins. Then make a short examen of conscience; and, as to sorrow, it is enough for you to say with sincerity an ordinary act of contrition; then go in peace and receive absolution, without fear or scruple. 'If you have,' says St. Theresa, 'a sincere purpose not to commit the sins which you confess, rest assured that you have a true sorrow.'"

2. The sorrow for sins must not only be sincere and heartfelt—it must also be a sorrow above every other sorrow. The sorrow which we feel at the loss of an object must be proportionate to the value of the object. Now God is a good infinitely superior to every other good. Consequently, the loss of God should cause us greater sorrow than the loss of anything else in the world.

Great is the sorrow of a poor orphan as she stands by the death-bed of her beloved mother—as she gazes on her pale, cold brow, and on those loving eyes which shall never more open upon her in this world. Yet our sorrow for having lost God by sin must be even greater. Great is the sorrow of a tender mother as she bends over the lifeless body of her only child, the child of her hope and love. And yet our sorrow for having offended God must exceed even this sorrow. Yes, if we are truly sorry for our sins, we must be willing to lose our health, our riches, and our honor; to lose friends and parents, to endure every pain, and even death itself, rather than lose God by consenting to another mortal sin. It is not necessary that this sorrow for losing God should be sensibly felt. We may indeed experience more sorrow at the loss of our honor—at the loss of a dear friend or relative; nevertheless, we must be ready to lose all rather than lose God. We may feel more terror at the sight of torment and death, and yet we must be ready to suffer the most cruel death rather than consent to a single mortal sin.

A girl was once listening to a sermon. Amongst other things she heard the priest say, “that if people want to make a good confession they must be more sorry for their sins than for anything else.” When the sermon was over the people went away. The girl remained behind. She went to the priest and said, “Please, your reverence, I think I made a bad confession.” “Why do you think so?” asked the priest. “I will tell you,” said the girl. “You said in your sermon, to-day, that if we want to make a good confession, our sorrow for sin must be greater than our sorrow for anything else. When I went to confession, I remember that I did not cry for my sins. But when my



poor mother died I remember that I cried very much. So I am afraid that my sorrow for my mother's death was greater than my sorrow for my sins." "Answer me one question," said the priest. "Tell me, if you could bring your mother back to life again by committing a mortal sin, would you commit that mortal sin?" "Oh! no," said the girl, "I would not commit a mortal sin for anything." "Then," said the priest, "you love God really more than your mother?" "Yes," answered the girl directly. "Then you really would be more sorry to lose God by sin than to lose your mother." "Yes," answered the girl, again. "Then," said the priest, "do not be afraid. Although you cried for your mother's death and did not cry for your sins, yet you were really in your heart more sorry for your sins than for your mother's death."

3. Contrition must not only be interior and sovereign, it must also be universal. We must be sorry for every sin, every mortal sin, without exception. King Saul was commanded by God to destroy all the wicked inhabitants of Amalec, and not to spare even a single one. Saul obeyed, but his obedience was not perfect. He destroyed everything, he burned down everything, he killed all the common people; but the king, who was the most wicked of all, he spared. God punished Saul for his want of obedience by taking away his crown and his life. There are many Catholics who, when they go to confession, act just like King Saul. God has commanded them, under pain of eternal damnation, to destroy every mortal sin, and every affection for sin, by a sincere and universal contrition. They obey indeed, but their obedience is not perfect. By contrition they destroy the slight, every-day failings; but there is one pet sin that they always spare—one wicked passion,

the ruling passion, which they will not destroy by true, earnest contrition. A certain person, for instance, goes to confession. He confesses that he cursed, that he was angry. He is perhaps truly sorry for these sins, but he has also been drunk several times, and for this sin, though he may confess it, he has no real, earnest sorrow. Such a man's confession is a sacrilege ; his sins are not forgiven.

Here is another sinner. He confesses that he has eaten meat a few times on Friday, that he has missed Mass and worked a few times on Sunday, but he has also eaten meat without necessity on fast-days, he has also missed Mass and worked on holy-days of obligation without necessity. These sins he hardly remembers, and has no real contrition for them. He has no sorrow for all his mortal sins, and therefore, he can receive pardon for none. His confession is worthless.

Another confesses that he has stolen and cheated very much ; that he has wantonly damaged his neighbor's property. He is sorry for these sins ; he is even willing to make restitution, to the best of his power. But there is another sin for which he has no real, earnest sorrow. He often takes pleasure in immodest thoughts and desires ; he is addicted to certain shameful secret sins. For these sins he is not truly sorry. His confession is, therefore, a mockery ; he can receive no pardon from God.

A mother of a family confesses all her sins, and is truly sorry for them. But there are some sins that she scarcely ever mentions in confession, some sins for which she has no true contrition. She allows her children to remain out late at night ; she does not keep them away from dangerous company—from balls and parties ; she allows them to read sentimental and immoral books—novels, trashy love-

poetry, and the like. Under the veil of marriage, she commits unnatural crimes. Her sins are not forgiven.

A young girl confesses that she has been proud and vain; that she has been disobedient to her parents, and so on. She is perhaps sorry for these sins. But there is another sin which she does not mention in confession, and for which she has no true sorrow. She often reads sentimental and dangerous books; she often remains out late at night; she keeps dangerous company; she sometimes allows improper liberties; she often harbors wicked thoughts and desires. These sins she does not confess, and, even if she confesses them, she has no true sorrow for them. Such a person's confession is worthless; it is a sacrilege. She does not obtain pardon from God, but the curse of God weighs on her soul; and until she truly repents of these sins, no priest in Christendom, no bishop, no pope, can absolve her.

There was once a man in prison chained fast to the wall. There were chains round his arms, and his feet. He wanted to get away, so he tried to loosen the chains. He worked very hard. At last he got the chains away from his arms. Then he slipped his right foot out of the chain. But when he came to work at the chain on his left foot he found it impossible to get it away. Take notice, it was all the same whether he was held fast to the wall by one chain only or by several chains, for he could not get away. In like manner, as long as the devil holds the soul by one mortal sin, the soul cannot get away from him nor have any of its sins forgiven.

4. Our sorrow for sin must not only be inward, sovereign, and universal, it must also be supernatural. We must be sorry for having sinned, because by sin we have offended and lost God who is so good.

Antiochus Epiphanes, king of Syria, committed many enormous crimes. He ordered the faithful Jews to be cruelly massacred; he plundered the Temple, and desecrated the Holy of holies. But the vengeance of God was swift and terrible. The impious king was stricken with an incurable disease. He was tortured by the most excruciating pain; his body was devoured by worms; his rotten flesh fell, piecemeal, from his body, and the stench which proceeded from him was intolerable. The unhappy tyrant began now to repent of his crimes. He promised God that he would restore everything he had stolen from the Temple; he even promised that he would renounce infidelity, travel over the world, and preach everywhere the true God. Surely, you will say, this was extraordinary contrition. Yet the Holy Ghost tells us that, "This wicked man prayed to God, but in vain! He received no pardon! (2 Mach. iii., 13.)

He died in a strange land—died in his sins. And why? Is not God infinitely merciful? Has not God sworn by himself that "he wills not the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live?" Why then did not God pardon this sinner? Because, though this wicked man wept bitter tears, though he promised to restore everything, though he promised to change his wicked life, his sorrow was only natural sorrow. He did not weep for having offended God. He wept only because he suffered such cruel torments, and because he saw that he was soon to die. His contrition was not supernatural.

Look at the drunkard: he weeps; he curses the hour in which he first tasted liquor. But why does he weep? Is it because he has offended God? Oh! no. He weeps because he has lost his situation—because he has fallen



into disgrace. His sorrow is therefore only natural. He cannot receive pardon on that account.

Contrition, then, in order to be acceptable to God, must be supernatural. We must be sorry for our sins either on account of their hideousness, or because, by them, we have offended God; or because, by them, we have deserved hell, and lost heaven.

5. Sorrow for our sins, moreover, must be accompanied by sincere humility. "God will never despise a contrite and humble heart." (Ps. 1.) The publican in the Gospel looked upon himself as one of the greatest sinners in the world. He durst not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, but humbly fixed them on the ground. He smote his breast, and thus moved God to compassion, and finally obtained pardon. Such are the sentiments with which we should approach the holy tribunal of penance. The inward shame which we feel at the sight of our offences will dispose us to obtain pardon. It is chiefly to dispose us for his grace that God has ordained the confession of our sins to the priest. If we sincerely acknowledge, before God, the evil we have done; if we consider the greatness of God whom we have offended, and our own vileness, we shall naturally feel humbled; we shall appear like criminals before God. We shall at least feel compelled to cry aloud with the prodigal: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, I am not worthy to be called thy son." (Luke xv., 19.) The sinner, by thus humbling himself, so moves the compassionate heart of God that he instantly forgives him and hastens to clasp him lovingly to his bosom and treats him, not as a criminal, but as a beloved child. With such humble contrition, with such sorrowful disposition, let the sinner draw nigh to the laver

of penance. He may then rest assured that our loving Redeemer, beholding in him these good dispositions, will not fail to shower down his most precious blood in such abundance on his soul as to cleanse him from all stain, and render him whiter and purer than the lily.

But let us bear in mind that this humility must be true and supernatural. Humility is not true whenever it is not joined to a strong and firm hope of obtaining forgiveness. There are two sorts of humility: one is the gift of God, the other comes from the devil. The humility which is God's gift brings with it, indeed, a knowledge of our sins and our unworthiness; but, while it lowers the soul in its own estimation, it also inspires a great confidence in God's goodness, and fills the soul with a holy and unutterable calm. The humility, however, which is from the devil, brings with it also a knowledge of our sins and weakness; but, while it depresses the soul, it takes away, or at least diminishes, our hope and leaves us full of doubt and discouragement. The humility which is God's gift, is holy; that which comes from the devil, is wicked. The humility which comes from God disposes us for pardon, whilst the humility that comes from the devil prevents forgiveness. Our confessions, therefore, must be made in the spirit of faith and hope; they should be accompanied with a sorrow not only humble, but full of faith and trust in God. Without such hope we shall never obtain pardon, because sorrow for sin, unaccompanied by the hope of forgiveness, instead of appeasing, only irritates the divine mercy. Cain repented of his crime; but, because he did not trust in the divine goodness, his sorrow availed him nothing. "My iniquity," cried he in his despair, "is too great to deserve pardon." (Gen. iv., 13.) Judas Iscariot in like manner

repented, and exclaimed, with tears : “I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.” (Matt. xxvii., 4.) Nay, he even made restitution of the money for which he had bartered away the precious life of his divine Master. But what did all this avail him ? Nothing whatever. His sorrow was devoid of every gleam of hope ; and, giving himself up for lost, he went and hanged himself.

Such, too, is the repentance of those who, after falling into some serious fault, or who, seeing that they relapse constantly into the same sins, are filled with bitterness, distrust and false humility, and say to themselves : “God will not pardon me ; he has turned his back upon me ; my weakness is beyond endurance ; I am continually yielding to the same faults.” Such repentance is without hope, and therefore worthless.

The devil appeared once to Faverius, a disciple of St. Bruno, while he was lying dangerously ill, and, after terrifying him in many ways, began to cast up his sins to him with impudent assurance. The servant of God replied that he had already confessed these sins and received absolution, and therefore had every cause to trust that God had pardoned him. “Confessed your sins ! Confessed your sins !” replied the fiend. “You have not told all ; you have not made a proper confession ; you have not explained all the circumstances. Your confessions are all invalid ; they are good for nothing ; they will serve only to make your judgment more terrible.” The holy monk, seeing his sins in the false light in which the devil represented them, began to be greatly alarmed. He was now tortured by the most agonizing scruples, so that he was on the point of despair. But the ever Blessed Virgin, the Mother of Mercy, who never forsakes those who are truly

devoted to her, appeared at this moment to the good monk, bearing the divine Infant in her arms, and said to him : " What dost thou fear, Faverius ? wherefore lose heart ? Be of good cheer. Thou hast almost reached the port. All thy sins have been forgiven thee by my most gracious Child." (Ex. Ann. Carthus.) At these words, the racking anguish felt by the dying man gave place to an humble, confiding, peaceful sorrow, and shortly after he calmly breathed his last.

Here, we may perceive the difference between the contrition which comes from God and that which comes from the devil. The latter is a sorrow full of doubt and anxiety, while the former is full of peace and confidence.

Let every one, therefore, strive to obtain from God true sorrow.

This kind of sorrow alone appeases God, obtains pardon for sin, and perfectly reconciles the sinner with God.

There are many who seem to think that the whole efficacy of the Sacrament of Penance depends on lengthy details, and in saying in many words what could be said in very few. A good confession does not consist in the multitude of words, but in the sorrow of the heart. He alone is truly converted, he alone has made a good confession, who strives to blot out, by heartfelt sorrow, those sins which his tongue confesses. The oral confession of sin is useful only inasmuch as it is the expression of a true and heartfelt repentance. Our dear Lord cursed the barren fig-tree, which, though full of branches and leaves, yet bore no fruit ; in like manner, he rejects and abhors such confessions as abound in unnecessary words but are barren of the fruit of efficacious contrition. Sorrow, and great sorrow, is what is needed ; not long explanations and



needless details. The truth of this is confirmed by the following incident :

Cæsarius Heisterbach relates that a young student at Paris, having fallen into many very grievous sins, betook himself to the monastery of St. Victor, and, calling the prior, fell at his feet in order to accuse himself of them. Scarcely had he begun to open his lips when his contrition became so vehement that his utterance was choked, and his confession hindered, by tears, groans, and convulsive sobs. The confessor, seeing that the youth was unable, from excessive grief, to say another word, bade him write down his sins on a sheet of paper, and come back when he had done so, hoping that, by this means, the young man would find it easier to make a confession of all his crimes. The student complied, and returned to the same priest ; but no sooner did he begin to read from his paper than, overcome anew with sorrow and tears, he was unable to proceed. The confessor then asked him for the paper, and as, in reading it, a doubt arose in his mind on some point, he begged the penitent's leave to show his confession to the abbot, in order to get his opinion. The contrite youth willingly consented, and forthwith the prior went to see the abbot and put the paper into his hands. The abbot on opening it found nothing but a blank sheet, without so much as a single stroke of the pen upon the page. "How, now," said he, "do you want me to read what is not written?" "But," replied the prior, "I have this moment read on that very paper the full confession of this penitent." Then both began to examine the paper afresh, and found that the sins had been blotted out, even as they were already blotted out of the conscience of the sorrowing youth. (*Hist. Mirac.*, lib. v., cap. 10.) Behold! this

student had not yet finished his confession, and he had already received the full pardon of his sins. Though he had said nothing with his tongue, he had spoken much with his heart, and nothing now remained for him to do save to fulfil the obligation of subjecting his sins to the absolution of the priest.

### 3. How many kinds of contrition are there ?

*Three : 1, perfect contrition, or sorrow for sin on account of the injury offered to God's goodness ; 2, imperfect contrition, or sorrow for sin on account of the injury done to our souls ; for, by offending God, we lose heaven, and deserve hell ; 3, natural contrition, or sorrow for sin on account of the injury done to our temporal welfare.*

Sorrow for sin may spring from different supernatural motives. Although these motives are all good, yet they are not all equally perfect ; and, consequently, the sorrow arising from these motives is not equally perfect. Hence, there are two kinds of supernatural contrition—*perfect* and *imperfect*. The sorrow which comes from a perfect motive, is *perfect contrition* ; while the sorrow that comes from imperfect, though supernatural motives, is *imperfect contrition*.

To illustrate : There are three brothers. They wilfully disobey their good father. They expect to be punished for having provoked their father's anger. They repent and crave pardon ; but from different motives. The first son loves his father most tenderly. The thought of having displeased him fills his heart with sorrow. He thinks more of the displeasure which he has caused to his father, than of the punishment which he has deserved. He is most willing to suffer the punishment, in order to obtain pardon, and to repair the evil he has done.

The second son does not love his father so tenderly. He has only the beginning of love for his father. This love is not strong enough of *itself* to induce him to be sorry for the offence ; it requires the assistance of some other motive, such as the baseness of his conduct and the fear of punishment. But, as he has some love for his father, he sincerely desires and firmly resolves to love him more tenderly in future.

The third son repents only from *mere* fear—love has no part in his sorrow. He cares not for the displeasure of his father, but only for his chastisement. He resolves, indeed, to obey in future, but merely out of fear. Evidently, this son deserves no pardon. These three brothers represent the three classes of sinners who repent of their crimes from different motives. The first son represents those who repent, from the pure love of their Father who is in heaven. They are sorry, not from fear of chastisement, but from the thought of having offended God who is infinitely good and worthy of all our love.

The second son represents those who repent partly from love of God, and partly from fear of his eternal chastisements. They know that, by offending God grievously, they have lost heaven and deserved hell. They fear the vengeance of God which is provoked by their iniquities. But, at the same time, a feeling of confidence in God's mercy encourages them. They hope that God, in consideration of Christ's merits, will pardon them. Animated by this hope, they begin to love God. This love leads them to detest their sins, to repent of them, to repair them as far as possible. They resolve to keep the commandments, and to use the necessary means of becoming reconciled with God. But, as this love of God is not altogether

pure, the sorrow proceeding from it is imperfect. This imperfect sorrow is called attrition.

The third son represents those sinners whose sorrow proceeds only from natural motives, such as the loss of honor, health, temporal goods and the like. This kind of sorrow is of no merit before God.

#### 4. What are the effects of Contrition ?

1, *Perfect contrition, being an act of perfect love of God, joined with the desire of confession, cancels our sins even before confession ; 2, imperfect contrition disposes us to receive the grace of God in the Sacrament of Penance ; 3, natural contrition cannot dispose us to receive the grace of God by absolution, because it is a sorrow, not for offending God, but merely for temporal injury.*

A few words will suffice to show the difference between the various kinds of contrition. They differ from one another, not only in their motive, as we have just seen, but also in their effects.

*Perfect Contrition*, joined to the desire of sacramental confession and absolution remits the guilt of sin and obtains for the sinner the grace of God even before he actually makes his confession and receives absolution. "It may sometimes happen," say the Fathers of the Council of Trent, "that contrition is rendered perfect by charity, and reconciles man to God before the actual reception of the Sacrament of Penance."

One day, a great sinner went to hear St. Anthony of Padua preach. Immediately after the sermon the sinner approached the saint, and entreated him to hear his confession. Though greatly fatigued, Anthony immediately entered his confessional to console the heart of the penitent.



But the latter was so overcome with sorrow as to be entirely unable to make his confession, his sobs and groans completely depriving him of the power of speech. As the saint was greatly pressed for time, he told his penitent to go home and write down his sins, and then come back. The man obeyed ; he went home, wrote down his confession, and then returned to his confessor. Now, when St. Anthony opened the paper, he saw with joy that he held in his hand a blank sheet of such dazzling whiteness that no one would ever suppose that there had been any writing upon it. The saint looked upon this prodigy as the happy indication of perfect contrition in his penitent.

Attrition disposes the sinner to receive sanctifying grace only when he actually receives sacramental absolution. "Although attrition without the Sacrament of Penance," says the Council of Trent, "cannot by itself justify the sinner, yet it disposes him to obtain the grace of God in the Sacrament of Penance."

This sacrament strengthens, and in some degree perfects, the love of God in the penitent by communicating to his soul sanctifying grace, which is the grace of charity—a gift which perfects contrition. Hence, St. Thomas says, that some who are imperfectly contrite, obtain, by the grace of this sacrament, the grace of contrition. (In Quodl. 4, art. 1.) "From being only attrite before absolution," says St. Alphonsus, "the penitent is enabled, by the grace of absolution, to become truly contrite."

It must, however, be observed here that a sinner ought to repent of his sins, not only because he has deserved hell, but also because he has offended God, and thereby deserved hell. Were a person sorry for his sins because by them he has deserved hell, but so disposed that, if there

were no hell, he would not give up sin, his sorrow would not only be worthless but it would even be sinful on account of the bad disposition of his will.

Contrition which is merely natural cannot dispose the soul to obtain sanctifying grace in the Sacrament of Penance. The swindler and the thief are sorry for what they have done. But is it because they have offended God? No! They are sorry because they have been arrested and put in prison. Such sorrow is vain before God, and can merit no pardon.

The unhappy young man who has wasted his health and happiness in striving to satisfy a brutal passion, laments and curses the day on which he was first led into sin. But does he weep for having offended God? No; he weeps because he has ruined his health; because he finds himself branded with a shameful disease; because he feels that he is a burden to himself, an outcast, an object of scorn to his fellow-men. His contrition is, therefore, not supernatural, and cannot merit pardon.

That unfortunate young woman who sighs and weeps like another Magdalen, weeps not because she has offended God, but because she has lost her honor; because she must now hide her face behind the veil of shame. Her sorrow is therefore only natural sorrow; she can receive no pardon.

"As the punishment of mortal sin is eternal," says St. Alphonsus, "so must the motive of sorrow be the eternal chastisement due to sin."

**5. Must we also be sorry for the venial sins which we confess?**

*If we have only venial sins to confess, we must be sorry at*

*least for one of them, in order to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily.*

If a person confesses both mortal and venial sins, it is not necessary, for the worthy reception of the sacrament, that he should be sorry for his venial as well as for his mortal sins. As we are not bound even to confess our venial sins, it will suffice if we are sorry for *all our mortal sins*. If we have only venial sins to confess, it is not required, for the worthy reception of the sacrament, that we should be sorry for every one of them. In this case, in order to receive the sacrament worthily, it suffices to be sorry for at least one of them. But if we are not sorry for at least one of them, the sacrament is null and void for want of sufficient matter. Only those venial sins are forgiven for which we are truly sorry. If we die without true sorrow for our venial sins, we shall have to suffer for them in the flames of purgatory.

**6. Can we have, of ourselves, true sorrow for our sins?**

*No; because true sorrow is a grace of God, for which we must earnestly pray.*

Father Thomas Burke, the great Dominican preacher, relates in one of his lectures the following incident: "I was once called to assist a dying man—dying after a long life of sin. The man had sense enough to sit up in the bed and say, 'Are you a priest?' I said, 'Yes, I am.' 'Oh!' he said, 'I am glad of it. Tell me: I want to know one thing. I want to know if you have the Blessed Sacrament with you?' 'I have.' The moment I said so he sprang out of the bed on to the floor, kicked, and plunged, and roared like a maniac! 'Oh! take away that God! take away that God! That man has God with him. There

is no God for me !' Oh ! I protest to you he was dead before I left the room, crying out to the last, 'There is no God for me !' "

Do you, my dear reader, wish to die thus ? But if you persevere in sin up to the last moment of your life, you have just as little hope for salvation. And why ? Will not God give you his grace ? Yes, God will give sufficient grace to every one, no matter how hardened, how wicked he may be. But to give up a wicked habit instantly, after a long life of sin, requires not merely ordinary grace, it requires an extraordinary, a miraculous grace. Now this grace God is not bound to give to any one. God offers you this grace now. He calls you now to repentance. Obey his voice. Do not turn a deaf ear to his call. Do you imagine, perhaps, that he will offer you his grace at the hour of death ? Do not deceive yourself. God is not to be mocked. Our Lord himself tells us what will happen to the careless sinner at that hour : " You shall seek me and you shall not find me, and you shall die in your sins. "

The great St. Jerome was one of the most learned as well as one of the most austere penitents that ever lived. He was stretched on his death-bed. That solemn moment had come when men see things in their true light, without disguise, without passion. His beloved disciples stood weeping around him ; they conjured him to tell them something of which he was most firmly convinced, and which they would always remember as his dying words. " Ah ! my children, " said the dying saint, " I am now at the point of death ; a few moments more, and I shall appear before my Judge. I declare to you, then, it is my firm, unwavering conviction, that out of a hundred thousand persons who have lived in sin till the hour of death, scarcely one is



saved. Yes, my children, I do not exaggerate ; my mind is not wandering, my imagination is not disturbed by sickness or by the approach of death. I know what I am saying, and I declare to you it is my firm, unwavering conviction—a conviction strengthened by a long experience of over fifty years—that out of a hundred thousand persons that continue in sin till the hour of death, scarcely one is saved.”

Let us ever be mindful of this great truth : Life is short, whilst eternity is endless. Is it a good traffic, for a few years of sinful life to suffer an eternity of torments ? When Dathan and Abiron were swallowed alive by the earth opening beneath their feet, those who witnessed the horrible spectacle, fled in terror, crying : “ Let us quickly depart hence that the earth may not also devour us.” (Numb. xvi., 34.) Alas ! thousands of sinners have been cast into the abyss of hell, where they burn, and will burn eternally, in punishment of their sins. Let us take a wholesome lesson from their fate. Let us leave at once the unhappy state of sin by a true and heartfelt sorrow, lest hell also devour us.

The grace of a true and sincere sorrow, however, is a special gift of God. “ If any assert,” says the Council of Trent, “ that, without the preceding inspiration and grace of the Holy Ghost, man can believe, hope, and love, or repent, in such manner as he ought, let him be anathema.” “ No one,” says the holy Church, “ can repent of his sins in such a manner as he ought, without a particular grace of God.”

Man, it is true, can of himself commit sin and offend God grievously ; but rise again from his fall by heartfelt sorrow he cannot, except by God’s grace.

Now for a grace so great we must prepare our hearts. Mgr. de la Mothe d’Orleans, Bishop of Amiens, confessed

every eight days. In his preparation for confession he made three stations : the first in hell, the second in heaven, the third on Calvary. He first descended in thought into the place of torments, and saw there the place he believed he had merited—in the midst of devouring and everlasting flames, in the company of devils and damned souls. He thanked the Lord for not having cast him into it, and besought him still to have mercy on him and grant him the graces necessary to preserve him from hell. He then ascended to the regions of glory. There, having groaned in spirit over the sins whereby he had closed the gates of heaven against himself, he besought the Lord to open these gates, and fervently invoked the saints. He then went in thought to Calvary, and considering attentively and lovingly his crucified Saviour, he said to himself: “Here is my work ! I am the cause of the pains and sorrow Jesus Christ endured ; I helped, by my sins, to cover with wounds the body of the Man-God, to crucify him, to put him to death ! O Jesus ! what harm has thou done me ? How could I treat thee thus : thee who hast loved me to excess ; thee whom I ought to love with an infinite love ? It is because thou art infinitely amiable I love thee, and repent of having offended thee.” (Cath. Anecdotes.)

By mortal sin we outrage the most high God, our eternal Judge ; we lose his grace, which is the life of our soul ; we become hideous and disfigured like an evil spirit ; we lose the merits of all our good works ; we forfeit heaven and place ourselves in imminent danger of being condemned to the torments of hell. The remembrance of this will help greatly to produce good sentiments in our soul at the time of confession, and to prepare us for receiving the grace of true contrition.

In order to obtain this grace we must pray for it, especially while assisting at the holy sacrifice of the Mass. It was through the blood of Jesus Christ, visibly shed on the cross, that the dying malefactor obtained the grace of conversion—of sincere repentance. In like manner, it is through the same blood, invisibly shed at Mass, that the heavenly Father grants us the grace of true sorrow for our sins. Let us therefore offer to him the blood of his beloved Son, Jesus Christ, in satisfaction for our sins, and beseech him, by the merits of this blood, to have mercy on us.

But, as our prayers may not be fervent enough to obtain for us this great grace of contrition, let us have recourse to the all-powerful intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary. She is the refuge of all poor sinners, and she has obtained this unspeakable favor even for the most abandoned.

St. Theresa tells us of a merchant who lived at Valladolid, in Spain. He did not lead a good Christian life; however, he had some devotion to the Blessed Virgin. When St. Theresa came to the town where this merchant lived, she wanted to find a house for her nuns. The merchant heard that the saint was seeking a house; so he went to her, and offered to give her a house which belonged to him. He said he would give her the house in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. St. Theresa thanked him, and took the house. Two months after this the gentleman became suddenly ill. He was not able to speak or make his confession. However, he showed, by signs, that he wished to beg pardon of our Lord for his sins: he died soon after. "After his death," says St. Theresa, "I saw our Lord. He told me that this gentleman had been very near losing his soul; but he had mercy on him when he

was dying, on account of the service he did to his blessed Mother by giving the house in her honor." "I was glad," says St. Theresa, "that his soul was saved, for I was very much afraid he would be lost on account of his bad life." Our Lord told St. Theresa to get the house finished as soon as possible, because the merchant's soul was suffering great torments in purgatory. It would not come out of purgatory till the convent was finished and the first Mass said there. When the first Mass was said, St. Theresa went to the altar-rails to receive holy communion. At the moment she knelt down she saw the gentleman standing by the side of the priest. His face was shining with light and joy, and his hands were joined together. He thanked St. Theresa very much for freeing his soul from the fire of purgatory, and the saint then saw him go up into heaven.

Let us, then, pray; and let us pray to the Mother of God for contrition, and we shall infallibly obtain this grace through her all-powerful intercession; her divine Son, Jesus Christ, can refuse her nothing.

### **7. When should we make an act of contrition?**

*We should make an act of contrition; 1, before confession or at least before the priest gives us absolution; 2, in danger of death; 3, whenever we have had the misfortune to commit a mortal sin.*

"It is true," says St. Alphonsus, "that attrition alone is sufficient to obtain the grace of God in the Sacrament of Penance. Every one, however, when preparing for confession, should endeavor to add to the act of attrition an act of contrition, for his greater security as well as for the greater benefit of his soul. This act of contrition may be made in the following manner: "My God! because thou



art infinite goodness, I love thee above all things; and because I love thee I am sorry above all things for all the sins I have committed against thee, the Sovereign Good! My God, I purpose never more to offend thee again."

Such an act of contrition should be made on three occasions: 1, Before confession; or at least before the priest gives us absolution, in order that we may be sure to receive the Sacrament of Penance worthily. 2, When we are in danger of death, in order that we may escape eternal damnation. 3, Whenever we have had the misfortune to commit a mortal sin.

"Let him who has had the misfortune to commit a mortal sin," says St. Alphonsus, "go to confession immediately; for he may die at any moment, and be damned." You say: "I will go to confession at Easter or Christmas." But how do you know that you will not die suddenly in the mean time? "I hope in God that I will not!" Yes; but should you have that misfortune, what would become of you? How many of those who put off their confession in the hope of going some future time, are now burning in hell? Death came upon them, and they were not able to make their confession. St. Bonaventure relates in the life of St. Francis (chap. x.) that while the saint was going about and preaching, a gentleman gave him lodging in his house. Moved with gratitude, St. Francis recommended him to God: and the Lord revealed to the saint that the gentleman was in the state of sin, and that his death was near at hand. The saint instantly called him, and made him go to confession to a priest, who accompanied him. Soon after the gentleman sat down to dinner; but, before he could swallow the first mouthful, he fell dead!

Venerable Bede relates that a certain man who had

once been fervent, fell into tepidity, and finally into mortal sin. However, he deferred confession from day to day. He was seized with a dangerous illness; and even then put off his confession, saying, that he would afterward go to confession with better dispositions. But the hour of vengeance arrived: he fell into a deadly swoon, in which he thought that he saw hell open under his feet. After he had come to his senses again, the persons who stood round his bed begged him to make his confession, but he answered: "It is too late; I am damned!" His friends continued to encourage him. "It is useless," said he; "I am damned. I see hell open; I see there Judas, Caiphaz, and the murderers of Jesus Christ; and near them I see my place, because, like them, I have despised the blood of Jesus Christ by deferring confession so long." The unhappy man died in despair without confession. He was buried, like a dog, outside the church, without having a single prayer offered for his soul. (Bede, Hist. cap. Angl. xiii.)

It may happen that a person who has fallen into mortal sin, has no opportunity to go to confession immediately. Let him in such a case make an act of contrition immediately, and purpose to go to confession as soon as possible. In order to be able to make a good act of contrition at the hour of death, he should accustom himself to make frequent acts of contrition during the day. He who is in the habit of making acts of contrition every day, will soon acquire a facility in making these acts.

It is a common saying that practice makes perfect, and there is scarcely any accomplishment which we cannot master by constant application. If we practise something over and over again, we shall at last succeed in doing it well. If we daily make a real act of sorrow for

our daily faults, if we try to nourish in our hearts a spirit of compunction and abiding contrition for our sins, we shall at last acquire a facility in making acts of contrition almost without effort. It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of such a habit as this. It will serve as an antidote against the faults which we constantly commit ; it will preserve us in the grace of God ; it will dispose us to receive unspeakable treasures of grace whenever we approach the sacraments ; and when death at last overtakes us, even though no priest be near to give us absolution, and to administer to us the Last Sacraments, this abiding sorrow will obtain for us the forgiveness of our sins and, through the mercy of God, ensure our eternal salvation.

#### PURPOSE OF AMENDMENT.

##### **1. What is meant by "purpose of amendment ?**

*Purpose of amendment is a firm resolution, by the grace of God : 1, to avoid all mortal sins, and the proximate occasions of sin ; 2, to use the necessary means of amendment ; 3, to make due satisfaction for our sins ; and, 4, to repair whatever injury we may have done to our neighbor.*

Contrition or perfect sorrow, and attrition or imperfect sorrow, must both be accompanied by the purpose of sinning no more.

To repent truly and sincerely is to grieve at the evil we have done, and to refrain from doing again the evil at which we grieve. In order that our past sins may not be imputed to us, sorrow and tears are not enough ; amendment is also necessary.

Our purpose of amendment must possess certain qualities. It must be :

1. *Firm* : that is, our purpose of amendment must be a real determination of the will to avoid both sin and the proximate occasion of sin, and to suffer every evil rather than offend God again. It is not enough to form an empty desire or barren wish to do better. Our resolution must be firm and practical.

2. Our purpose of amendment must be *universal* : that is, it must extend to all mortal sins whatever ; and if we have to confess but venial sins, our purpose of amendment must apply to at least one of them. In speaking of contrition we said that it is necessary to be sorry for all our mortal sins. We must therefore have contrition for all the actual sins of our past life, though not for all the sins which we may possibly have committed. Now, with regard to the purpose of amendment, the case is different. We must not only be determined to avoid falling again into any of our former sins, but we must also be resolved to avoid, at least implicitly, all possible mortal sins. Just as he who has committed two mortal sins cannot be truly sorry for one while he cherishes an attachment to the other ; so neither can he, who excepts any possible mortal sin from his good resolution, have a true purpose of amendment.

Cesarius relates a frightful occurrence which took place at Paris. There was, in that city, a canon of the church of Notre Dame. He was, unhappily, a priest only in name. He did not practise the virtues becoming his holy state of life. Now this canon, being at the point of death, entered at last into himself, acknowledged the wretched state of his soul and seemed to be really penitent. Having sent for his confessor, he accused himself, with abundant tears, of all his sins, and received the holy viaticum and extreme unction with every outward mark of piety. He



then gently breathed his last. He was buried with the highest honors, and the day appointed for the funeral was so beautiful that it looked as if heaven and earth had united to enhance the pomp of the funeral obsequies. Every one deemed this man one of the happiest that had ever lived, since, after having enjoyed all the pleasures of this world, he had, by a happy death, secured for himself the glory of heaven.

Such was the common opinion, for man sees only what is external; but God beholds what lies hidden within. After a few days, the deceased canon appeared to a holy servant of God, and told him that he was damned. "What!" exclaimed the holy man in astonishment, "you confessed with sorrow and tears; you received the holy sacraments with devotion." "True," said the lost soul, "I did confess, and I was sorry, yet not with an efficacious sorrow and purpose of amendment. My will, even in the very act of repenting, was still inclined to sin. I thought to myself that, if restored to health, I would return to that which I so dearly loved; while I detested the evil which I had committed, I had no earnest and firm purpose of renouncing sin." Having said this, the lost soul disappeared.

## **2. What is meant by the proximate occasion of sin?**

*By the proximate occasion of sin is meant any person, place, amusement, and so on, that generally leads us to sin.*

We must avoid not only every mortal sin, but also the proximate occasion of mortal sin. Every one of us has, from his childhood, experienced a certain inclination to evil. We naturally feel, for instance, more inclined to anger than to meekness, to disobedience than to submission; we are

more prone to hatred than to love ; more inclined to gratify the evil desires of our heart than to practise the holy virtue of purity ; we prefer our own ease to visiting Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, or receiving him in the holy communion. We are naturally indifferent towards God and his holy religion ; we lack fervor in his service ; we often feel more inclined to join a forbidden society than to enter a pious confraternity ; we often find more pleasure in reading a bad or useless book than one that is good and edifying ; we sometimes listen more readily to uncharitable and unbecoming conversation than to the word of God ; we feel naturally more inclined to vain-glory, pride, and levity, than to humility, self-control, and the spirit of mortification.

Now, when we place ourselves wilfully amid circumstances in which this natural inclination to evil is nourished, so strong does this inclination become that it is morally impossible to resist it. Charles, king of Navarre, was once affected with great weakness of the nerves. By order of the physician he was sewed up in cloths moistened with brandy, in order that, by this strengthening stimulant, his body might be heated and his drooping spirits revived. The attendant who sewed the cloths, instead of cutting the thread foolishly burned it off. The linen at once took fire, and burned with such fury that it was impossible to save the poor prince. In a few moments he was burnt to a cinder. Let us bear in mind that our soul is wrapped up in weak flesh, saturated not with brandy, but with something a thousand times more inflammable—with our passions. Now, if we bring our soul too near the occasion of sin, it will immediately take fire. The very presence, the very sight of the object of our passion, has a fascinating power. A moment's conversation, a single word, a look, a gesture

are sometimes sufficient to enkindle this hellish fire in the soul.

Hence any object, person, place, or circumstance which frequently leads one into sin, is said to be for that person the proximate occasion of sin.

There is one, for instance, who frequents the society of certain companions, in whose company he knows that he is sure to be tempted to sin by immodest conversation, by discourses against charity, or by cursing, quarrelling or gambling. For such a one these wicked companions are a proximate occasion of sin.

There is another who knows from sad experience that his frequent visits to the saloon and the bar-room are the cause of his drunkenness. For him the proximate occasion of sin is evidently the bar-room, the drinking-saloon.

Another knows that when once he begins to drink he cannot stop until he has drunk to excess. For him the proximate occasion of sin is intoxicating liquor.

Another has an employment which causes him to fall very frequently into sin. A man, for instance, keeps a bar-room. Now a bar-room, if properly conducted, is not sinful in itself; but the owner knows from experience that, so long as he keeps this bar-room, he cannot give up the sin of drunkenness; moreover, he sells liquor to drunkards, thereby causing them to commit thousands of sins. This business is for him the proximate occasion of sin.

Another has an immodest picture, or the picture of one whom he loves with sinful passion, and the sight of this picture incites him to evil thoughts and desires. This picture is for him the proximate occasion of sin.

Another has an occupation in which he is continually tempted, almost forced, to cheat and to steal. He buys

and receives stolen goods. He is continually tempted by the bad example of others to steal from his employers, on the plea that he does not receive enough wages. Or he cheats in buying and selling because his employer tells him to do so. This employment is for him the proximate occasion of sin.

Another works in a factory, in a foundry, in a printing-office, in a store or shop where he is continually obliged to listen to curses and blasphemies ; where he must hear his holy faith ridiculed and misrepresented ; where he is almost continually tempted to take part in shameful, immodest discourses. If he very frequently yields to these temptations and commits sin, that place and his fellow-workmen are for him the proximate occasion of sin.

Another helps to print, or to sell Protestant, infidel, and immoral books. Another sings or plays in heretical or infidel churches, and thus gives scandal and encourages others in false worship. These employments are for such persons proximate occasions of sin.

Another sends his children to heretical or infidel schools, where they are in evident danger of losing their faith and their innocence. These godless schools are for the children, and, consequently, for their parents and guardians, the proximate occasion of sin.

A young man lives in a house where he is continually tempted and falls into sin ; or a young woman lives in a place where she has fallen into sin again and again. Such places and circumstances are for such persons proximate occasions of sin.

Another frequents the theatre and ball-room : she goes to fairs, pleasure parties, excursions, watering-places, where she is always tempted to sin, and, unhappily, very often



yields to the temptation. These places of amusement are for her the proximate occasion of sin.

A young man keeps company with a person whose very presence causes him to fall into thousands of sins of thought and desire, and tempts him to take certain common but sinful liberties. The company of this person is for him the proximate occasion of sin.

There is another. He is fond of reading bad books. Now what is a bad book? Bad books are: 1. Idle, useless books which only distract the mind from what is good. 2. Many novels and romances which seem harmless, but which in reality are bad. 3. Books which treat professedly of bad subjects. 4. Bad newspapers, journals, miscellanies, sensational magazines, weeklies, illustrated papers, certain so-called medical works. 5. Superstitious books, books of fate, etc. 6. Protestant and infidel books and tracts.

There are certain idle, useless books which, though not bad in themselves, are pernicious because they cause the reader to lose the time which he ought to spend in occupations more beneficial to his soul. He who has spent much time in reading such books, and then goes to prayer, to Mass, and to holy communion, instead of thinking of God and making acts of love and confidence, will be constantly troubled with distractions; for the thoughts of what he has read will be constantly present to his mind.

The mill grinds the corn which it receives. If the wheat be bad, how can the mill turn out good flour? How is it possible to think often of God, and to offer him frequent acts of love, oblation, petition, and the like, if the mind is constantly filled with the trash read in idle and useless books?

In a letter to his disciple Eustochium, St. Jerome stated for her instruction that, in his solitude at Bethlehem, he was very fond of reading the works of Cicero, and that he felt a certain disgust for pious books because their style was not polished. Almighty God, foreseeing the harm of this profane reading, and that, without the aid of holy books, the saint would never reach that height of sanctity for which he was destined, administered a remedy very harsh, no doubt, but well calculated to make him alive to his fault. He sent a grievous sickness on the saint which soon brought him to the brink of the grave. As St. Jerome was lying at the point of death, God called him in spirit before his tribunal. The eternal Judge asked him who he was. The saint answered unhesitatingly, "I am a Christian; I hold no other faith than thine, my Lord and my Judge." "Thou liest," said the Judge; "thou art a Ciceronian, for where thy treasure is, there thy heart is, also." He then ordered him to be severely scourged. The servant of God shrieked with pain as he felt the blows, and begged for mercy, repeating in a loud voice, "Have mercy upon me, O Lord! have mercy upon me." Meanwhile, they who stood round the throne of that angry Judge, falling on their faces before him, began to plead in behalf of the culprit, implored mercy for him, and promised, in his name, that his fault should be corrected. Then St. Jerome, smarting with pain from the hard strokes he had received, began to promise and to swear with all the ardor of his soul, that never again would he open profane and worldly books, that he would read only such as were pious and edifying. As he uttered these words he returned to his senses, to the amazement of the bystanders, who had believed him already dead. St. Jerome concludes

his narration with these words : "Let no one fancy that this was an idle dream, like those which deceive our minds in the dead of night. I declare, in presence of the dread tribunal before which I lay prostrate, that it was no dream, but a real occurrence; for when I returned to myself, I found my eyes swimming in tears, and my shoulders livid and bruised with those cruel blows." He tells us, finally, that, after this warning, he devoted himself to the reading of pious books with the same diligence and zeal that he had before bestowed upon the works of profane writers. It was thus that Almighty God induced him to that study of divine things which was so essential to his own progress in perfection, and destined him to do so much good to the whole Christian world.

It is true that, in works like those of Cicero, we sometimes find useful sentiments; but the same St. Jerome wisely said in a letter to another disciple : "What need have you of seeking a little gold in the midst of so much dross, when you can read pious books in which you shall find all gold without any dross?" (Epis. ad Furian.)

As to novels, they are, in general, pictures, and usually very highly-wrought pictures, of human passions. Passion is represented as working out its ends successfully, and attaining its objects even by the sacrifice of duty. These books, as a class, present false views of life; and, as it is the error of the young to mistake these for realities, they become the dupes of their own ardent and enthusiastic imagination. Instead of trying to control their passions they actually nourish them with the poisonous food of phantoms and chimeras.

When the young are at last possessed by an insatiable thirst for novel-reading, they come to live in an unreal

fairy-land, amidst absurd heroes and heroines, thus unfitting themselves for the discharge of the common duties of this every-day world, and for association with every-day mortals. The more strongly works of fiction appeal to the imagination, and the wider the field they afford for its exercise, the more dangerous in general are their attractions. It is but too true that they cast, at last, a sort of spell over the mind, so completely fascinating the attention that duty is forgotten and positive obligation laid aside to gratify the desire of unravelling, to its last intricacy, the finely-spun web of some airy creation of fancy. Fictitious feelings are excited, unreal sympathies aroused, unmeaning sensibilities evoked. The mind is weakened; it has lost that laudable thirst after truth with which God has endowed it; filled with a baneful love of trifles, vanity and folly, it has no taste for serious reading and profitable occupations; all relish for prayer, for the word of God, for the reception of the sacrament, is lost; and, at last, conscience and common sense give place to the dominion of unchecked imagination. Such reading, instead of forming the heart, depraves it. It poisons the morals and excites the passions; it depraves all the good inclinations a person has received from nature and a virtuous education; it chills, by little and little, pious desires, and, in a short time, banishes out of the soul all that was there of solidity and virtue. By such reading, young girls lose the habit of reserve and modesty, assume an air of vanity and frivolity, and show ardor only for those things which the world esteems and God abominates. They espouse the maxims, spirit, conduct, and language of the passions, which are, in such reading, under various disguises, artfully instilled into their minds; and, what is more dangerous,



they cloak all this irregularity with the appearance of civility and an easy, complying, gay disposition.

St. Theresa, who fell into this dangerous snare of reading idle books, writes thus of herself: "This fault failed not to cool my good desires, and was the cause of my falling insensibly into other defects. I was so enchanted with the extreme pleasure I took herein that I thought I could not be content if I had not some new romance in my hands. I began to imitate the latest fashions, to take delight in being well dressed, to take great care of my hands, to make use of perfumes, and to affect all the vain ornaments which my condition admitted. It is true my intention was not bad. I would not, for the world, give any one an occasion of offending God; but I now acknowledge that these things, which, for several years, appeared to me innocent, are really criminal."

Criminal and dangerous, therefore, is the disposition of those who fritter away their time in reading such books as fill the mind with a worldly spirit, with a love of vanity, pleasure and idleness. Such reading destroys all the generous sentiments of virtue in the heart, and sows there the seeds of every vice. Who seeks nourishment from poison? Now our thoughts and reflections are to the mind what food is to the body; for by them the affections of the soul are nourished. The chameleon changes its color as it is affected by pain, anger, or pleasure; and we see insects borrow their hue and lustre from the plant or leaf upon which they feed. In like manner, just as our meditations and affections are, such also will our souls become—either holy and spiritual or earthly and carnal.

In addition to their other dangers, many of these books unfortunately teem with **maxims** subversive of all faith.

The current popular literature in our day is permeated with the spirit of licentiousness, from the pretentious quarterly to the arrogant and flippant daily newspaper ; and the weekly and monthly publications are mostly heathen or maudlin. They express and inculcate, either stoical, cold, and polished pride of intellect, or, empty and wretched sentimentality. Some employ the skill of the engraver to caricature the institutions and offices of the Christian religion, while others exhibit the grossest forms of vice and the most distressing scenes of crime and suffering. The illustrated press has become to us what the amphitheatre was to the Romans, when men were slain, women outraged, and Christians given to the lions to please a degenerate populace. "The slime of the serpent is over it all." It instills the deadly poison of irreligion and immorality through every pore of the reader. This fatal miasma floats in the whole literary atmosphere, is drawn in with every breath, corrupting the very life-blood of religion in the soul. Thus it frequently happens, that the habitual perusal of such books soon banishes faith from the soul, and in its stead introduces infidelity. He who often reads bad books will soon be filled with the spirit of the author who wrote them. The first author of pious books is the Spirit of God ; but the author of bad books is the devil, who artfully conceals the poison which such works contain. Written, as they generally are, in a most attractive, flowery style, the reader becomes enchanted, as it were, by their perusal, not suspecting the poison that lies hidden under that beautiful style.

See that young man. His passion, like a furious steed, bears him away. Soon he plunges headlong into the slimy abyss of impurity. He finds a degrading pleasure in

reading the vilest works. By degrees he begins to doubt of the most sacred articles of our holy faith. At first he is timid ; he has yet a conscience. He hears yet the voice of God, warning him. But he closes his eyes to the light. He stifles the voice of his conscience. At last he begins to deny boldly the most vital article of our holy religion. The light of faith grows dim. He becomes an infidel.

If that man is rich, he becomes a scourge to society. He makes use of his wealth and talents only to find new victims for his insatiable lust ! Finally, he becomes a member of some oath-bound secret society. He hates the sight of a priest ; he hates religion, he resolves to banish it from the face of the earth. Ah ! he wishes to gratify his beastly passions, without fear, without restraint. He lives like a brute, and therefore he wishes to die like a brute —without the priest, without the sacraments, without God !

Oh, what a misfortune for that good Catholic wife to see the husband whom she loves a confirmed infidel ! He will not believe what the Church teaches ; no, but he places full faith in the assertions of some shallow infidel. That infidel book, that infidel paper, is his Gospel. The hollow maxims and unmeaning ceremonies of the lodge are his religion.

What a misfortune for the children to hear from the lips of their own father, expressions of contempt for that holy faith that should be dearer to them than life itself !

What wonder if the children of such a father grow up infidels and become at last the pest of society. Those infidel works have ruined the father, and, through him, they have also ruined the children.

Count all the fruits of bad reading, as we see them around us in society : the loss of faith, the early ruin of childhood, the corruption of youth, the irreligion of man-

hood the hopeless remorse of old age ; the degradation of woman, the dishonor of the family by crimes against the sacred laws of marriage, the loss of truth and honesty in business as well as in the various departments of government ; the growing dissatisfaction and demoralization of the working classes,—all these and many more are the poison-fruit of that forbidden tree—the tree of the knowledge of evil—the wide-spread reading of corrupt literature.

But, it is objected : “ The book is not so bad.” Now of what do such books treat ? What religion do they teach ? Many of them teach either deism, atheism, or pantheism. Others ridicule our holy religion and everything that is sacred. What morals do these books teach ? The most lewd. Vice and crime are deified ; monsters of humanity are held out as true heroes. Some of these books speak openly and shamelessly of the most obscene things, whilst others do so secretly, hiding their poison under a flowery style. They are only the more dangerous because their poisonous contents enter the heart unawares.

A certain person was very sorry to see that a certain bad book was doing so much harm. He thought he would read it that he might be better able to speak against it. With this object in view he read the book. The end of it was that instead of helping others he ruined himself.

Some say : “ I read bad books on account of the style. I wish to improve my style. I wish to learn something of the world.” This is no sufficient reason for reading such books. The good style of a book does not make its poisonous contents harmless. A fine dress may cover a deformed body, but it cannot take away its deformity. Poisonous serpents and flowers may appear very beautiful, but for all that, they are not the less poisonous. To say that



such books are read purely because of their style is not true, because those who allege this as an excuse, read novels which are written in a bad style. There are plenty of good books, written in excellent style, which are sadly neglected by these lovers of pure English.

To consult such books for a knowledge of the world, is another common excuse for their perusal. Well, show me an example of one who became a deep thinker, an eloquent speaker, an expert business man, by reading novels and bad books? They teach only how to sin. It was under the pretence of attaining vast knowledge, that Satan tempted Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, and the result was loss of innocence, peace, and paradise, and the punishment of the human race through all time, and even for eternity.

Some profess to skip the bad portions and read only the good ones. But how are they to know which are the bad portions unless they read them? The pretext is false. He only will leave the bad who hates it. But he who hates the bad things will not read the books at all, unless he be obliged to do so. Now, no one is obliged to read such things, for there are plenty of good, profitable, and entertaining books which can be read without danger.

There is another who says: "Bad books may hurt others, but not me; they make no impression on me." Happy and superior mortal! Are you gifted with a heart of stone, or have you a heart of flesh and blood? Have you no passions? Why should these books hurt others and not you? Is it because you are more virtuous than others? Is it not true that the bad, obscene parts of the story remain more vividly and deeply impressed upon your mind than those which are less hurtful? Did not the

perusal of these books sometimes give rise to imaginations and desires forbidden by Christian modesty ? Did you not sometimes accuse yourself in confession of having read those books ? If you did not, you ought to have done so. Would you like to die with such a book in your hand ? Readers of bad books, who say such reading does not affect them, should examine themselves and see whether they are not blinded by their passions, or so far gone in crime, that, like an addled egg, they cannot become more corrupt than they already are. Ah ! how soiled must be that baptismal robe in which a new stain cannot even be noticed !

See that infamous young man, that corrupter of innocence ! What is often his first step when he wishes to corrupt some poor, innocent girl ? He first lends her a bad book. He knows that if she reads that book she is lost. A bad book is an agreeable corrupter ; it hides vice under a veil of flowers. It is a shameless corrupter. The most licentious readers would blush, would hesitate to speak the language that their eyes feed on. But a bad book does not blush ; it feels no shame, no hesitation. Itself unmoved and silent, it places before the heart and imagination the most shameful obscenities.

A bad book is a corrupter to whom the reader listens without shame, because he can read it alone and take it up whenever he pleases.

Go to the hospitals and brothels ; ask that young man who is dying of a shameful disease ; ask that young woman who has lost her honor and her happiness : go to the dark grave of the suicide ; ask them what was the first step in their downward career,—and they will answer it was the reading of bad books.

A few years ago, a young girl, in the State of New York, was sent to a convent-school, where she received a brilliant education. She spoke seven languages. She wished to enter a convent, but was prevented by her parents. Her parents died, and after their death the young girl took to novel-reading. She soon wished to imitate what she had read ; she wished to become a heroine. So she went upon the stage and danced in the "Black Crook." At last she fell one day, on Second Avenue, in New York, and broke her leg in six places. She was taken to a hospital, where a good lady gave her a prayer-book. She flung it away and asked for a novel. She would not listen to the priest who encouraged her to make her confession and be reconciled to God. She died impenitent, with a novel in her hand.

Assuredly, if we are bound by every principle of religion to avoid bad company, we are equally bound to avoid bad books ; for, of all evil company, the worst is a bad book. There can be no doubt that the most pernicious evils at work in the world at this moment, are bad books and bad newspapers. The yellow-covered literature is a pestilence, compared with which the yellow fever, and cholera, and small-pox are nothing ; and yet there is no quarantine against it. Never take a book into your hands which you would not be willing to read in the presence of your parents or of the priest. Avoid not only notoriously immoral books and papers, but also all those wretched sensational magazines, novels and illustrated papers which are so profusely scattered around on every side. The demand which exists for such garbage speaks badly for the moral sense and intellectual training of our youth. If you wish to keep your mind pure and your soul in the grace of God,

you must make the firm resolution never to touch such corrupt literature.

Would you be willing to pay a man for poisoning your food? Why then should you be so foolish as to pay the authors and publishers of bad books and papers for poisoning your soul with their impious principles and their shameful stories and pictures?

By keeping, reading and lending such books you give scandal. "Woe to that man," says Jesus Christ, "by whom scandal comes." (Matt. xviii., 7.) Now, if you are looked upon as a virtuous and sensible person, you give only the the greater scandal by reading books and papers which, though they may not do you much harm, do harm at least to those who are weaker, and who are led by your example.

You must sometimes abstain from what is lawful, as St. Paul teaches, lest you ruin the soul of another. Now, if charity obliges you to abstain sometimes even from what is lawful, how much more are you obliged to abstain from what is dangerous; from that which is condemned by the law of God and his holy Church?

St. Denis of Alexandria was blamed by his people for reading the writings of heretics. This accusation was even forwarded to the Pope; and the Pope advised him not to give pain to his people by such reading. (Euseb. Hist. Eccl. lib. 7. c. 7.) One of his priests also advised him to refrain from touching such mire lest he should defile himself. "I felt in my heart that he was right," says the holy bishop, "and a heavenly vision convinced me of the truth of his remarks."

**3. Are we strictly bound to avoid the proximate occasion of sin?**

*Yes, as far as possible; for he who is not willing to avoid*



*the occasion of sin, does not sincerely purpose to avoid sin itself.*

He who has the misfortune to be living in the proximate occasion of sin, is bound, as he hopes for salvation, to give up this occasion, no matter what it may cost. As long as he remains in the proximate occasion of sin, the devil laughs at all his good resolutions. As long as he remains in the power of the devil, the evil spirit does all he can to keep him enslaved ; and should he, at last, have the happiness to cast the devil out of his heart by a good confession, the evil spirit has no rest till he enters again. The devil knocks at the door of that man's heart by his temptations. The devil knows, from experience, the weak side, the ruling passion, of all of us.

There is one who says : " Oh, there is no great danger ; I am strong enough. I am sure I could live forever in the proximate occasion of sin without falling. I hate sin ; no one can ever induce me to commit it again. I would rather die than sin again." Are you sure of this ? Are you certain that you will not fall if you remain in the proximate occasion of sin ? No matter how strong you are, you will certainly fall, if you remain in the proximate occasion of sin. The proximate occasion leads us to sin in two ways : First, it increases our natural weakness, our natural inclination to sin ; and, secondly, by seeking out the proximate occasion of sin, we deprive ourselves of the special assistance of God. Every one knows that, at times, his will is very weak, his passions fearfully strong. Even the great apostle St. Paul experienced this sad effect of original and actual sin : this corrupt inclination to evil. " I feel," he says, " in my members an inclination which wars against my reason. I do not the good which I wish to do, but

the evil which I hate." (Rom vii., 19.) When a man places himself wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin, this natural inclination to sin becomes so strong that it is morally impossible to resist it. Suppose you were starving with hunger and were to see before you a table filled with the choicest viands, would you be able to refrain from stretching out your hand and taking the food? Or suppose you were parched with thirst, and were to see before you a cup of cool, fresh water, or a goblet of sparkling wine, would you have the strength to resist your ardent longing for a cooling drink; would you leave that cup untouched? How often does it happen that persons, who have long been starving with hunger or parched with thirst, when, at last, they find food, eat and drink with the greatest avidity, even though they know that, by so doing, they will lose their life? And do you think that you will be able, without the special grace of God, to resist your furious passions, in presence of the very object of your passion—that object, too, which you wilfully seek out and love? Why do you seek it out? Why do you go to meet it, unless with the desire and purpose of enjoying it? And yet you would fain deceive yourself with the thought that you are resolved to avoid sin, at the very moment that you go to meet it and even invite its approach. Are you blind or senseless that you do not know that the presence of the object of your passion has a fascinating power over you which, without God's special grace, you will not be able to resist? But this special grace God does not throw away on those who wilfully turn their back on him and seek out the danger. He who goes alone to meet sin must stand or fall alone; and his fall will be speedy.

In proximate occasions of sin even saints have fallen

and persons on the point of death have been lost. Father Segneri, S. J., relates that a certain person who had lived in the habit of sin with a young man, called for a confessor at the hour of death, and, with tears, confessed all the sins of her life. She then asked leave of her confessor to send for the young man, in order that the sight of her suffering and death might convert him. The confessor, very imprudently, gave the permission, and taught her what she should say to the young man when he came. But what happened? As soon as the dying girl saw the young man, she forgot all her good resolutions. She raised herself up in the bed, stretched out her arms towards him, and said: "My dear friend, I have always loved you, and love you now more than ever. I see that on your account I shall go to hell, but I do not care; I am willing for the love of you to be damned." Having said these words she fell back on her pillow and expired. (*Christian Instructed*, Part I., Reg. xxiv., n. 10.)

To remain free from sin, in the proximate occasion of sin, requires a miracle; a miracle far greater than to walk unhurt through the midst of a raging fire. Now, a miracle is a thing that cannot be performed without the special and extraordinary assistance of God: but this assistance God will not, and cannot give, to those who remain wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin. You may say as often as you please, "Oh! God is good, he will not suffer me to fall; I will pray to him, and he will assist me." God will not assist you as long as you remain wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin. Listen to God's own words: "He that loves danger shall perish in it." (Ecclus. iii.)

For God to give you his assistance as long as you seek and love the proximate occasion of sin, would be to go

against his own sanctity and justice. One day, Satan took our blessed Lord and placed him upon the pinnacle of the temple in Jerusalem, and tempted him to cast himself down, saying that the angels would bear him up; but Jesus answered: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Now, whoever exposes himself wilfully to the proximate occasion of sin, tempts God; he is guilty of the sin of presumption.

Moreover, it is the teaching of all theologians that, as often as you expose yourself wilfully to the proximate occasion of sin, even though you may not thereby commit any other sin, you still become guilty of a mortal sin merely by so exposing yourself. This is evident; for God forbids not only the sin itself, but also everything that naturally and necessarily leads to sin. It is, therefore, absolutely certain that, if you seek the danger, if you love the danger, you shall perish in it.

To say that, in certain cases, it is allowed to remain wilfully in the proximate occasion of sin, is a proposition condemned by the Church; and, consequently, to believe such a thing is to be guilty of heresy. One day, a certain woman who was living in sin, was passing near a church. She saw a great crowd. Curious to know what was going on, she entered, and, the crowd increasing, she soon found herself so surrounded that it was impossible for her to retire. A venerable missionary ascended the pulpit, and preached on the mercy of God. Among other things he repeated these words several times: "My brethren, there is pardon for every sin, provided the sinner repents." This woman, who heard all very attentively, fixed her mind particularly on these words. As soon as the discourse was finished, she made her way through the crowd,



and, approaching the preacher just as he came down from the pulpit, she pulled him by the sleeve and said: "Is it really true, Father, that there is pardon for every sin?" "Nothing is more certain, madam! God forgives all sinners if they truly repent." "But," said the woman again, "there are all sorts of sinners; does God forgive all without distinction? Would he pardon me who for fifteen years have committed the greatest crimes?" "Undoubtedly," answered the missionary, "he will pardon your sins, if you only detest them and cease to commit them." "If that be so, father, I pray you tell me at what hour you will hear my confession." "I can hear you immediately, madam; prepare yourself, and I will be back in a moment." The missionary pointed out his confessional, and returned some time after to hear her. After having made her confession, she said to the missionary: "Father, I cannot return home without exposing myself to the danger of falling again into sin; could you not procure me a shelter for the night?" The missionary explained to her that he could not do so without great difficulty, and the woman resolved to remain in the church all night. Next morning, when the doors were opened she was found lifeless in a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin; she was kneeling, with her face prostrate on the ground, and the pavement was wet with her tears. She lamented her sins so bitterly that she died of grief. The missionary, being apprised of what had happened, went to the place and recognized her as the person whose confession he had heard on the previous night, and admired the greatness of God's mercy. (Noel, *Cat. de Roetz*, iii., 237.)

It may happen that a person cannot immediately forsake the occasion of sin without suffering a great loss. There

is one, for instance, who holds a situation which is to him a constant occasion of sin. But himself and his family depend on the situation for support. What is he to do in such a case? In such a case, he is bound to make use of the necessary means to keep him from falling into grievous sin. Such means are: the frequent reception of the sacraments, prayer, the remembrance of the presence of God, of the four last things—death, judgment, hell and heaven; the frequent renewal of his good resolutions, and other remedies which a prudent confessor may suggest. If the sinner refuses to make use of such preservatives, or if, in spite of their use, he does not keep from sin, he cannot receive the sacraments. Every occasion of mortal sin, in which the danger is not rendered remote by the use of proper means, must be abandoned, cost what it may. “If thy hand,” says our Lord, “or thy foot scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to go into life maimed or lame, than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thy eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. It is better for thee, having one eye, to enter into life, than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire.” (Matt. xviii., 89.) As to remote occasions of sin, that is, such occasions in which a person falls but seldom, it is advisable to avoid them as far as possible. It is impossible, however, to shun all remote occasions of sin during our earthly pilgrimage. Moreover, the danger of falling in the remote occasions of sin may be safely guarded against in various ways.

It is well to remark that there are some who are strongly inclined to evil, and who have contracted a sinful habit, especially the habit of impurity. Now for such persons

there are certain occasions which are proximate or nearly so, which, for others, may be remote or even quite harmless.

Many years ago there was a bold young fisherman living on the coast of Norway. One dark, stormy night he took it into his head to go out in his little fishing-boat. His parents and brothers entreated him to stay, but he would not heed them. He sailed on bravely in his tiny bark, till at last the sun arose, warm and bright, upon a placid, glassy sea. Overcome by fatigue and heat, the young man fell asleep. How long he slept, he knew not. Suddenly he was aroused from his slumbers by a loud shouting in the distance. He looked round and saw his father's boat. The crew were crying aloud, and waving their hands to invite him back. But they made no effort to reach him. What was the matter? What could they mean? The young man seized his oars, and began to pull lustily towards them. But he was amazed to find that the fishing-boat towards which he had turned the prow of his bark, appeared, now on his right hand and, soon after, on his left. He had evidently been making a circle. He was going round in a spiral curve, and now he was commencing another and a narrower one. A horrible suspicion flashed upon his mind. He threw off his cloak, and pulled like a madman at his oars. But though he broke the circle a little here and a little there, still round he went, and every time he drew nearer and nearer to the centre. Soon he could distinctly hear the roaring of the water; and as he looked he could see a downward funnel hissing and foaming. He now threw down his oars in despair, and flung up his arms frantically. The wild sea-bird screamed in his ear; he cast himself flat on his face; he shut his ears with his hands; he held his very breath. The

boat spun round and round—the gurgling waters roared above him and he was whirled headlong down into the yawning abyss.

The story of this young fisherman is, unhappily, the story of so many in our age and country. The whirlpool is the abyss of hell. Within its vortex are daily drawn thousands of souls. They are drawn into it by different currents: some, by the current of licentious and infidel literature; others, by the current of ignorance of the true religion; others, by the current of sinful pleasures; others, by the current of godless education; others, by the current of secret societies; others, by the current of lewd, infidel companions; others, by the current of sinful marriages; others, by the current of infidel governments, rebelling against Christ and his Church. If we sincerely desire not to be lost for ever, we must keep out of such currents; that is, we must avoid the proximate occasion of sin.

Our purpose of amendment must be *efficacious*; that is, we must be resolved to use the means which God has given us to amend our lives. He who is firmly determined to attain a certain object, will use the means by which he can gain that object. A student, for instance, who wishes to become learned, studies diligently. In like manner, he who is really determined to avoid sin will make use of such means as will enable him to avoid offending God. An unwillingness in the sinner to adopt the necessary means of amendment, is an evident proof that his contrition and purpose of amendment are defective.

There is a sinner. He says: "I do not wish to offend God any more. But I am so weak, and the occasions of sin are so strong that I cannot help falling. I would wish to keep my resolutions, but I am not able." "My son,"



answers St. Alphonsus, "you have not an efficacious purpose of amendment, and therefore you say: "I wish, I wish. Know that hell is full of such wishes. It is a mere empty *wish*, not a true resolute *will* or purpose. A true purpose is a true, resolute will to suffer every evil rather than relapse into sin."

In order to commit a mortal sin, it is very often necessary to do or to leave undone some external act which it is entirely in your power to do or not to do. God says, for instance: "Thou shalt not steal." Now, in order to steal, you have to put out your hand and take what does not belong to you.

Very often, even, it requires several free external acts before a mortal sin is consummated. The drunkard, for instance, has to seek the occasion. He goes to the bar-room, and the steps he takes on his way thither form a separate act. He drinks again and again, and it is only after all these different and repeated actions that he falls into the mortal sin of drunkenness. Now, all these acts it is perfectly in his power to do or to leave undone.

See how the martyrs suffered rather than commit a mortal sin. They were stoned to death; they were crucified; they were flayed alive; they were torn to pieces by wild beasts; they were burnt to ashes, and died amid excruciating torments.

Now why did they suffer all this? "They suffered," you will say, "because they would not deny Christ." Very true; but how were they required to deny Christ? What were they required to do? Sometimes they were required only to take a few grains of incense and throw it on the altar of some false heathen divinity. That would have been enough to save them from sufferings and death.

They were not obliged to say : " I renounce Christ." They were told only to take a little incense.

Sometimes they were required to tread on the cross. Sometimes they were told to swear by the genius of the Roman emperor,—that was all. And the fire was kindled to make them do this, but they would not. The flames leaped up around them, but they would not lift their foot to tread on the cross. Their hands were burnt to the bone, but no incense would they touch. The marrow of their bones melted with fervent heat. The torments forced from them a cry of agony, but their lips would not utter the name of the genius of the emperor.

Now, will you tell me that you cannot help committing sin, when the martyrs suffered so much, rather than consent to sin ? The fire and the scourge were before them, and they refused to do wrong ; you have no one to force you, and still you say you cannot help sinning.

The martyrs died, rather than raise their hand or foot to do what was forbidden. Now, have you not the same power over your hands and feet that they had ? Had they not passions and weakness of flesh and blood as you have ? They died rather than utter a sinful word. Have you not the same power over your tongue that they had ? You certainly have, for you can easily control your hand and your tongue whenever you will. Do not deceive yourself. There is not a sinner on earth whose actions are not perfectly in his power. The thief waits for the night to carry on his infamous trade. During the day-time he can be honest enough. The most depraved libertine knows how to behave properly in presence of a high-born and virtuous lady. And even the most foul-mouthed curser and slanderer knows how to restrain his tongue, in presence of the priest,

or some other friend whom he greatly respects. Now, I ask you : If you can stop cursing in presence of the priest, in presence of your companions, in presence of your wife and children, why can you not do so always ? If you can be chaste in presence of a virtuous lady, why can you not be so everywhere ? If you can be honest when the eyes of men are on you, why can you not be honest when the eyes of God are watching you ?

But some one will say : " What you say is all true, with regard to sins of action ; but there is another class of sins to which your remarks will hardly apply. I mean sins of thought and desire. These sins are of such a nature that one can scarcely help committing them."

Now, it is true that it is more difficult to guard against sins of thought and desire ; yet it is entirely in your power to consent to these thoughts or not. An evil thought is in itself no sin ; it becomes a sin only when you consent to it, when you take deliberate pleasure in it. To keep your mind always entirely free from evil thoughts, may be impossible, because the imagination is often so restless that but few men have perfect control over it. But remember that, if it is not always possible to restrain the imagination, it is always possible to restrain the will.

In order to fall into mortal sin you must know what you are doing and you must make a deliberate choice ; you can, therefore, never commit a grievous sin unavoidably or unawares. All the men on earth and all the devils in hell cannot force you to commit a mortal sin. Your will is free. God himself respects your free will. He will never take it from you or destroy it. Moreover, the voice of God speaks to you in your conscience, so that it is scarcely possible for one who habitually tries to keep

from mortal sin, to fall into sin without receiving from his conscience a distinct and unmistakable warning.

But you will say: "Suppose these evil temptations continue in the soul even when we resist them and try to turn away from them?" Well, even suppose they should continue; then you, too, must continue to resist them.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century, the famous Spanish Knight Marco Gutierrez was commissioned by his master, the lord of Biscay, to guard the fortified castle of Gujar against the attacks of Alonzo IX., king of Leon. Alonzo used every means to gain possession of the castle. He offered Gutierrez presents; he threatened to put him to death without mercy, unless he surrendered. But Gutierrez was insensible to his threats as well as to his bribes.

At last, king Alonzo resolved to lay siege to the castle. And indeed a long and terrible siege it was. It lasted seven entire years, and still the king could gain no decisive victory over the brave defenders of the castle. At last, however, these brave men, worn out by fatigue and hunger, died, one after the other. Gutierrez alone remained, determined to defend the fortress to the last. Although deprived of every aid, and feeling his bodily strength fast sinking, he still refused to open the doors of the castle. He placed the keys around his neck, lay down near the inner-gate of the tower, and there calmly awaited death.

The besiegers again assaulted the castle; they climbed the ladders, they scaled the walls, but what was their astonishment when they found no one to resist them! They descended into the castle-yard, and there found Gutierrez, the only living defender. Though exhausted and dying he seemed to the last more intent on defending the castle than on protecting himself.



King Alonzo was so moved at witnessing the heroic fidelity of this brave knight, that he wept with compassion. He provided for him with every possible care and set him at liberty.

By the sacrament of confirmation we have become soldiers of Jesus Christ. We, too, should, therefore, defend the castle of our soul with unflinching fortitude against all the assaults of hell. As faithful Christians our motto should ever be : “No surrender !”

As long as you resist the temptations of the devil, as long as you do not consent to them, you do not commit sin. Nay, these very temptations even become the occasion of great acts of virtue. The holy virgin Catharine of Sienna was once assailed by the most horrible temptations of the devil. She struggled long and at last overcame them. Our dear Lord then appeared to her with a serene countenance. “O my divine Spouse,” she cried, “where were you when I was struggling with these horrible temptations ?” “In thy soul,” he replied. “What !” cried she, amazed, “with all these filthy abominations ?” “Even so,” replied Jesus. “These temptations were displeasing and painful to thee, and therefore they have been for thee an occasion of great merit.” Yes, no matter, how strong the temptation is, you can always resist ; if you consent it is always your own fault.

But some one will say : “I know it is my fault when I sin, but I am weak and frail by nature. I have become so weak and frail by habitual sin, that it is impossible for me to avoid falling sometimes into mortal sin.” Now this is not true ; and it is a burning shame for any man, and especially for a Christian, to speak thus. Listen to the words of God himself. Surely he knows our nature

and our weakness, even better than we do. "God is faithful," says St. Paul, "and he will not suffer you to be tempted above your strength. God will give you, with the temptation, the means to overcome." (1 Cor. x., 13.) No matter, then, how weak and frail you may be *naturally*, you can do everything with the grace of God. And God is always ready to give his grace to every one who asks for it. "Every one that asketh, receiveth." (Matt. v., 42.) And this promise is made to all—to sinners as well as to the just. "It is true, the temptations of the devil may be strong," says St. Alphonsus, "but God is stronger than the devil; and with his aid we can conquer all the temptations of hell." "Praising, I will call upon the Lord," said David, "and I shall be saved from my enemies." (Ps. xvii., 4.) "He who recommends himself to God in the time of temptation shall never fall," says St. Alphonsus. "There is, therefore, no excuse for those who consent to sin. If they only recommend themselves to God, he will stretch out his hand, and support them; and they will not fall. He, then, who falls into sin, falls through his own fault, either because he will not ask aid from God, or because he will not avail himself of the aid which the Lord offers to him."

The efficacy of the purpose of amendment must also show itself, as the Catechism says, in the sinner's readiness to make due satisfaction for his sins, and to repair whatever injury he may have done to the property or the good name of his neighbor. He, therefore, who refuses to perform the wholesome penance imposed on him by the priest, or who refuses to restore, as far as possible, the good name, or the property of his neighbor, such a one shows clearly that he has not the necessary contrition and purpose of amendment.

A great sinner went once to confession to the venerable Pierre de Corbeil, archbishop of Sens, who lived in the fifteenth century. He made a sincere confession of all the crimes he had committed, and he did so amid sighs and tears, asking with humility if God would really forgive him. The prelate answered him : " Doubt it not, my son, provided you are sincerely resolved to do penance." " What ! " cried the contrite and humble sinner, " will God, whom I have so grievously offended, be satisfied with that ? Ah ! impose on me whatever you will, I am ready to do it ! But how can you ever impose a penance upon me long enough, severe enough, to equal the heinousness of my crimes ? " The holy prelate, himself shedding tears of compassion and of joy on meeting a sinner so well disposed, said to him : " Your penance shall be only for seven years." " Father ! " cried the sinner, " only seven years ! What ! so small a penance for such crimes,—crimes so great that I cannot expiate them even in the whole course of the longest life ! " " It shall be less still, my dear child, " said the archbishop, more and more touched by his sorrow, " for I oblige you only to fast three days on bread and water." " Ah ! Father, " cried the penitent, striking his breast very hard, " do not destroy me, I beseech you ; I am at your feet, and I implore a mercy I cannot too dearly purchase : let my penance be as long as possible, in proportion to my iniquity ; spare not my weakness ; I am ready to do and undertake every thing, provided I can obtain pardon. The venerable confessor, inspired by God, and filled with admiration for the workings of grace, then told his penitent : " Be of good cheer, my son ; I oblige you to say only the Lord's Prayer, once ; and I have every reason to believe that all your sins shall be forgiven you." At these words

the penitent, whose heart was broken with grief, uttered a loud cry, expressing at once his astonishment and his gratitude towards the God of mercy, and immediately he fell at the feet of the holy archbishop, and expired with grief for having offended so good a God.—GUILLOIS, *Nouv. Explic. du Cat.*, 390.

What a touching example of perfect contrition ! Such, then, is the nature of the contrition required in the Sacrament of Penance. Without this true sorrow for sin confession and absolution are of no avail. Some persons bring the silly objection that confession tends to encourage sin by promising forgiveness on such easy terms. But surely this objection can be made only by those who are ignorant of the teaching of the Catholic Church on this subject. If we Catholics maintained that confession alone, without repentance or amendment of life, was all that was required for the forgiveness of our sins, then indeed there might be some truth in the objection. But such a doctrine has always been condemned by the Church. To sin, in the hope that God will readily forgive us, is to be guilty of presumption. The true penitent says, with St. Margaret of Cortona :

I've found my Love ; ne'er more shall we be parted !  
 To him I've pledged my troth in life and death.  
 His faithful love lives on in joy and sorrow,  
 His pure love knows not sin's poisoned breath ;  
 His glorious home gleams o'er the starry sky,—  
 With him to dwell for aye, I yearn and sigh.

In childhood's hour while yet near heaven's portals,  
 He stood beside my couch and fondly smiled.  
 He won my heart's first love ; and all my sorrows  
 With his unearthly beauty, soon beguiled :  
 Around me shone fair Eden's golden beams,  
 While angel strains seemed floating through my dreams !



A robe he gave me than the lily fairer,  
More costly than the queens of earth can wear;  
He bid me dwell in his bright halls forever,  
And guard my snow-white robe with sleepless care.  
Ah, me! did I but heed his loving voice,  
My weary, weeping heart might now rejoice!  
A stranger came and showed me crowns all golden,  
And rosy wreaths, and sparkling gems so bright.  
The rosy wreaths soon twined around my heart-strings;  
A strange love lured me—ah, 'twas night—dark night!  
Yet ever haunted me that face so mild,  
That o'er my childhood's couch so fondly smiled!  
Amid the gilded halls of wealth I wandered,  
Entranced by song and music's witching spell,  
While loving lips poured forth their sweetest incense,  
And loving eyes spake more than tongue can tell;  
But still 'mid all the joys of wealth and art—  
Ah, God! what anguish wrung my throbbing heart!  
Could I, dear Lord, forget thy bitter anguish?  
Forget thy love, thy bleeding wounds, thy tears?  
Forget the first love of my sinless childhood?  
Thy gentle voice that calmed my childish fears?  
Could I forget thy face so pure, so still?  
I fled,—I wept,—I could not weep my fill.  
And lo! the Bridegroom stood once more beside me,  
So sad, so pale, so God-like, yet so meek!  
Methought my heart would burst with shame and sorrow,  
I could but weep—my lips refused to speak.  
Will not his pure love spurn his faithless spouse?  
I breathed his name, with childhood's early vows.  
O Joy! O Joy! He saw my heartfelt sorrow,  
He saw my love, my tears, my pain, my shame;  
He spoke sweet words that thrilled my soul with gladness,  
He smiled once more and called me by my name;  
His pure blood mingled with my flowing tears,  
And cleansed the stains of lost and buried years!  
I've found my Love; ne'er more shall we be parted!  
To him I've pledged my troth in life and death.  
His faithful love burns on in joy and sorrow;  
His pure love knows not sin's empoisoned breath;  
His glorious home gleams o'er the starry sky,  
With him to dwell for aye, I yearn and sigh!

## CONFESSION.

**1. What is confession?**

*Confession is the telling of our sins to a priest, in order to receive absolution or forgiveness.*

Confession is the accusation of our sins to a priest with a view to obtain their forgiveness. The practice of confession is as old as the world. The first person to hear confession was Almighty God himself. The first sin that was ever committed on earth had to be confessed before it was pardoned, and God pardoned no one without confession. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, ate of the forbidden fruit, and thereby committed a mortal sin. God called Adam to account; and Adam confessed his crime. "Yes," he said, "I did indeed eat of the fruit, but it was my wife that gave it to me." Eve also confessed her crime, and put the blame on the serpent: "I did eat the fruit," said she, "but it was the serpent that deceived me." Our first parents confessed their sin, they repented of it, and God pardoned them, and even promised them a Redeemer.

Cain also committed a mortal sin: he murdered his innocent brother. But Cain refused to confess his crime, and God granted him no pardon. God called Cain to account, and asked him: "Where is thy brother, Abel?" But Cain answered impudently: "I know not; have I then to keep watch over my brother?" And God cursed Cain, and set a mark upon his brow, that he might serve as a warning to all men.

God not only heard confession himself, but he gave a positive command requiring confession of sins. It would be tedious to cite all the passages of the Old Testament wherein this command is clearly specified. One alone is sufficient: "Whosoever shall commit a sin and carelessly

transgress the commandments of God, the same shall confess his sin and restore." (Numbers v., 6, 7 ; Lev. xxvi., 40 ; Prov. xxviii., 13.) Moreover, the Jews were commanded to bring an offering according to the nature of their sins ; for each sin had its specified offering. They had to confess their sins to the priest, that he might be able to offer the suitable sacrifice.

Not only the priests of the Old Law, but the prophets also, heard confession. King David committed a grievous crime. In order to gratify a sinful passion, he put an innocent man to death, and then took away that man's wife. God sent his prophet to the king to upbraid him for his wickedness, and the prophet related to the king the following touching parable : " There lived," said he, " in a certain city, two men : the one was rich, the other was poor. The rich man had a great many sheep and oxen, but the poor man had nothing at all but a little lamb. He had bought this lamb at a great price. He nourished it with great care. It grew up in his house with his children ; it ate of his bread, it drank of his cup, it slept in his bosom, and he loved it as a daughter. Now, a stranger came one day to the house of the rich man, and there was a great feast. But the rich man spared his own sheep and oxen, took the poor man's lamb, killed it, and served it up to the stranger." King David, on hearing this, was exceedingly angry, and he cried out : " I swear, by the living God, that the man that has done this deed shall die, and shall restore fourfold ; for he has had no pity." Then the prophet, looking sternly at the king, said : " Thou art the man ; it is thou who hast done this deed. Listen now to the word of the Lord thy God : I have anointed thee king ; I have delivered thee from the hands of thine enemies ;

I have given thee thy master's house and possessions ; and if these were little, I would have bestowed upon thee far greater gifts. Why, then, hast thou despised me, thy Lord and God, murdered an innocent man, and taken away his wife ? And now, because thou hast done this deed, the sword shall destroy thy children ; I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house. Thou hast dishonored me in secret ; but I will dishonor thee in the sight of the sun, before the eyes of the whole world ; and this child, the fruit of thy sin, shall die ! ” On hearing this, King David was terrified and conscience-stricken. He humbled himself before God and his prophet, and confessed his sin ; and the prophet, seeing the king's repentance, pardoned him in the name of God. “ Now God has taken away thy sin, ” said the prophet, “ thou shalt not die. ”

The example of the great St. John the Baptist, the last prophet of the Old Law and the first of the New, shows us also clearly how customary it was among the Jews to confess their sins. The Evangelist says that the “ people came to St. John from all directions, and he baptized them, and they confessed their sins. ” (Matt. iii., 6.) Even at the present day the practice of confession still exists among the Jews in many parts of the world.

Confession, then, was necessary in the Old Law ; but it is also necessary in the New Law. Men sinned in the Old Law ; men sin also in the New. Our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ tells us expressly that he came, not to destroy the law, but to perfect it. (Matt. v., 17.) When our Lord came on earth, confession of sin was already in use not only among the Jews, but also among the heathens. That confession was in use among the heathens is a fact proved by such abundant and such incontestable evidence,



that to deny it is to betray a very gross ignorance of history. It is an undeniable fact that confession was in practice among the pagans of Greece and Rome. No one, not even the emperor himself, could be initiated into their mysteries without first confessing his sins to one of their priests. In Egypt, in India, in China, in Peru, the same practice of confession was strictly observed. Even at the present day, confession is practised among many heathen nations. In China, in Thibet, in Siam, in India, in Persia, the heathens still confess their sins to their heathen priests, just as they did two thousand years ago. Not only the Jews, then, but the heathens also, confessed their sins.

Our divine Saviour perfected this universal custom, this express law of confession, by raising it to the dignity of a sacrament, and thereby rendered it even still more binding. It is this circumstance, and this alone, that can account for the remarkable fact that the sacrament of confession never met with any opposition, either on the part of the Jews or on the part of the heathens. It appeared quite natural to them, for they had been accustomed to it even from the beginning of the world.

God himself heard confessions in the Old Law ; God himself also, the Son of God, our Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, heard confession in the New Law.

It was about noon, one warm summer's day, that our Saviour came with his disciples to the well of Jacob, not far from the town of Sichar, in Samaria. Hungry, and thirsty, and footsore from his long journeys in search of erring souls, he sat down beside the well, whilst his disciples went into the city to buy food. And Jesus sat there all alone beside the well, his head resting on his hand. There was an expression of longing desire on his divine coun-

tenance, for he expected some one. And, lo! a certain woman came out of the city to draw water. Jesus said to her: "Give me a drink." The woman was surprised and touched by the great condescension of our Lord, for the Jews despised and hated the Samaritans. "How is it," said she, "that you, who are a Jew, ask a drink of me, who am a Samaritan? for the Jews never associate with us?" "Woman," answered Jesus, "if you knew the gift that I have to bestow, if you knew who I am that speak to you, you would ask a drink of me, and I would give you living water." "Good sir," said the woman, in a bantering tone, "you have no vessel here, and the well is deep; how then can you give me this living water?" Jesus answered: "Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again; but he that drinks of the water I have to give, shall not thirst for ever. Yea, it shall become in him a fountain of living water, springing up into eternal life." Now came the moment for which Jesus had sighed and waited with such anxiety. The poor woman felt in her heart a great desire to drink of this living water. "Good sir," said she, "give me, then, to drink of this water, that I may not thirst any more; and then I need not come here any more to this well." This is the course which the Saviour always pursues in winning souls. He first awakens in the heart of the sinner a great desire to receive his graces; then he humbles the sinner, shows him his misery, and thus prepares him to receive his graces.

The Samaritan woman begged Jesus to give her this living water, and Jesus immediately said to her: "Go now and call your husband." A strange command. Where, one might ask, is the connection here? The woman asks for the living water, and Jesus tells her to go and call her

husband. Ah, it is now that this poor woman begins her confession. "Call your husband," said Jesus. The woman cast down her eyes and answered quietly: "Good sir, I have no husband." "You have said the truth," answered Jesus; "you have no husband. Five husbands you have had, and the one you have now is not your husband—you have told the truth." An unpleasant disclosure, indeed. But the poor woman, sinful as she was, was at least no hypocrite. She immediately acknowledged her sins; she blushed and hung down her head, and said: "Good sir, I see that you are a prophet." She was now filled with reverential awe for Jesus—for she felt that he could see into her heart. But, at the same time, the extraordinary mildness of our Lord filled her with great confidence in him. She now began to ask him which was the true religion. Jesus explained all to her with the utmost simplicity, and finally told her that he himself, who was speaking to her, was the long-expected Redeemer. The poor woman's joy was unbounded. She forgot to close the well, though it was strictly forbidden to leave it open—she forgot her jar of water—she could think only of the living water she had just discovered. She hastened back to the city, and cried aloud to all she met: "Come out to the well: I have found the Redeemer of the world!" And to confirm her words, she was not ashamed to cry boldly: "I know that he is the Redeemer, for he has told me all that ever I have done." (John iv., 25.) This is one of the confessions which our divine Saviour heard himself, in order to show us the necessity of confession.

Our Saviour not only heard confession himself, but he also gave this divine power to his apostles, as we have seen above. (2. Q. on Penance.) He came on earth to forgive

the sins of all men ; but he was not to live always here on earth, and, consequently, he had to leave this power to his successors, the apostles. The apostles, too, for the same reason, had to transmit this power to their successors, the bishops and priests, and this power must necessarily remain in the Church as long as there are sins to be forgiven.

The apostles clearly understood that they had received the divine power to forgive sins, and to transmit this power to their successors. In the Acts of the Apostles, as well as in their writings, we find express mention made of confession. St. Luke tells us that, whilst the apostles were at Ephesus, the faithful came and confessed their sins, and those who had been addicted to magic, brought their books and burnt them publicly. (Acts xix., 18.) The apostle St. John also tells us : " Let us confess our sins, for God is just and faithful." (1 John i., 9.) God is just ; therefore he requires a candid confession. God is faithful ; therefore he will really pardon the sinner through the priest, as he has promised.

St. Paul says expressly that he and the other apostles received from Christ the power of forgiving sins. (2 Cor. v., 18-20.) St. Clement, the disciple of St. Paul, whom St. Paul names in his Epistle, and who preached only what he heard from St. Paul,—this disciple speaks expressly of confession. He says that " in the other world neither confession nor penance will be of any avail." All the Fathers of the Church, from the apostles down to our own day, speak of confession as a sacrament instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ himself. All the older heretics and schismatics, without exception, the Armenians, the Copts, the Greeks, the Russians, have retained confession even to this day.



There is one fact that even the greatest infidel will admit: it is that confession is now practised all over the world—in the North, in the South, in the East, and the West. Confession is practised in every country in Europe; it is practised in Asia, in Africa and Australia; in the far-off islands of the Pacific. Everywhere, wherever a Catholic priest and a Catholic congregation are to be found, there confession is practised; and it is not only practised but required, and required, too, under pain of eternal damnation.

Now whence did this positive law, this universal custom, originate? It must have come either from men or from God himself. Now it is evident that men would not, of their own accord, have introduced confession. We see, every day, how men do all in their power to free themselves from the obligation of confession. The priest has to urge them, the Church has even to command them. Confession is very hard for flesh and blood. It is very humiliating to human pride to be obliged to confess our sins to a priest—to a man like ourselves. Most assuredly, no mere human authority could have succeeded in laying so heavy a burden upon men. Human authority did indeed succeed in abolishing confession, for a while, in certain countries where it was practised. But no human authority could ever establish confession and make it a universal law binding in conscience. After the Protestants had abolished confession in certain parts of Germany, they soon perceived that the greatest disorders began to prevail, and that no one was any longer in security; so they themselves requested the Emperor Charles V. to issue an edict obliging all to go to confession, “for,” said they, “since confession has been abolished, it is impossible to live in peace with one another.”

But the emperor knew that neither he nor any other human authority was able to introduce confession, and that no human authority was able to establish confession, much less could any human authority maintain so difficult a precept. So he could not help laughing at such a silly request, and at the ignorance and stupidity of those who made it.

But, supposing any mere human authority had tried to introduce confession, who would be the most violent opponents of such a practice? Who would be the very first to shake off such a heavy burden? Why, precisely Catholic bishops and priests? And why? Because they feel the pressure of this burden even more than laymen. Popes, bishops and priests are obliged to confess their sins just as well as the simple layman. They are, moreover, bound to hear the confessions of others. Now what can be harder than this? How often must not the priest risk his health, his life, and even his immortal soul in order to hear the confession of some poor sinner! How often must the priest visit the plague-stricken in the hospitals! How often must he remain for hours in a close room beside those infected with the most loathsome diseases?

While St. Charles Barromeo was bishop of Milan, the pestilence broke out in that city. The priests of the city and of the neighborhood entered the houses of the plague-stricken. They heard their confession; they administered to them the Last Sacraments. Neither the fear of death nor the loathsome disease could appal them; and, during that terrible scourge, more than one thousand priests died as martyrs of confession. A few years ago a certain priest of this country was called to hear the confession of a dying man. The priest was unwell; he was suffering from a

violent fever; nevertheless, he started on his errand of death. He had to travel over thirty miles on foot, in the depth of winter. After having administered the Last Sacraments to the dying man, the good priest himself fell upon the floor, administered to himself the viaticum, and expired.

Now, could the Catholic priest bear such trials, could he brave such dangers, were the hand of God not with him? And would he suffer so much, and suffer it only in order to be able to assist and console his children, to hear their dying confessions, and reconcile them to God—would he suffer all this, I say, did he not believe and know that confession is from God,—did he not know that as a priest of God he had the power of forgiving sins? Yet all those hardships, which the Catholic priest must sometimes endure in the exercise of the sacred ministry, are but slight when compared to the interior trials, the trials of the soul, which he must often undergo precisely on account of confession. But the voice of the Lord must be obeyed. He commanded the apostles and their lawful successors to teach all nations. He commanded them to baptize all who would believe in their word. He declared that no one would enter into the kingdom of heaven without baptism. The same Lord gave power to the apostles to forgive sins: “Whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven.” Let us praise and magnify the Lord for having given such power to man!

## **2. For whom is confession necessary?**

*For those who have committed mortal sin after baptism.*

Two gentlemen went, one day, to visit a certain church in Paris. While examining its decorations and monuments, their attention was attracted by a priest who was engaged in hearing confessions in one of the side chapels. The

two began to laugh at the confessor and his penitent. "Hold!" said one of the gentlemen to his companion, "I wish to have some fun. Excuse me for a short time. We'll meet again this evening, at the theatre." "What do you intend to do?" said the other. "Never mind," answered the first; "I wish to play a little practical joke." So, leaving his friend, the gentleman went to examine some paintings till the priest came out of the confessional. As soon as the priest came out, the gentleman followed him into the sacristy. "Father," said he, "I intend to go to confession; but you see, I must take my time. You know, I presume, that men like me are not exactly saints; I, in particular, claim a greater share of your indulgence, as my faith is none of the strongest. I should be thankful if you would solve certain difficulties that I have. They are exaggerated perhaps by prejudice, but still sufficient to make me neglect, nay even hate and despise, confession." "You are, then, a Catholic?" asked the priest. "Of course I am," answered the gentleman; "I even went often to confession, in my youth. But what I have since read, heard, and seen of confession has been more than sufficient to keep me away from it; you can imagine the rest yourself." "Easily enough," answered the priest; "but you have not succeeded equally well in finding out the way to overcome your prejudices. Go to confession, my dear sir, and you will soon change your opinion." "What! go to confession without having my objections solved? Indeed I cannot do that; I should first wish to see you prove the necessity of confession." "Go to confession, my dear sir, with a sincere resolution of changing your conduct, and you will have no more doubt on this subject than I have." "How! what do you mean?" "I mean



that you have lost your faith by your bad conduct ; you began to find fault with confession only after you had abandoned yourself to vice."

The gentleman blushed and after a moment's hesitation—"That is exactly the truth," said he, throwing himself into the arms of the priest—"that is exactly the truth ! How is it possible that I did not think of that myself ? I cannot go to confession, to-day. I came only with the intention of making fun of confession. Avenge yourself on my folly by becoming my conductor : I pledge my word of honor to come to you on whatever day you may appoint,"—and the gentleman kept his promise.

After this first step all his prejudices vanished, and during the rest of his life he continued to think of confession like a Christian, because he lived like a Christian. (*Soirées Villageoises*, vol. i.)

It is sin alone that keeps men from confession. They who fly from confession are, assuredly, never actuated by the desire of becoming more virtuous ; on the contrary, they stay away because they desire to gratify their passions more freely. The man of pure and chaste morals fears not the humble confession of his faults. The tree is known by its fruit ; you never hear an upright, moral man speak against confession. Confession is a want of our nature. Everything which is truly interior must be outwardly expressed. The love for Christ within us must manifest itself externally in works of charity to our brethren. What we do unto these we do to him also. It is the same with contrition and the confession of sins before God, an act itself purely internal ; if it be deep, strong, and energetic, it seeks an outward manifestation, and becomes the sacramental confession to the priest ; and what we do

to the priest we do unto Christ himself, whose place he holds.

Origen rightly compares sin to an indigestible food, which causes sickness and nausea, until it is cast forth. In like manner, the sinner is tormented with internal pain, and he enjoys peace and health of soul only when he has unburdened his conscience by a good confession. The man who never opens his heart to any one, who never reveals his joys and his sorrows, who never discloses to a kind friend the dark deeds that press so heavily on his conscience, such a man is not to be trusted; he cannot be happy. Man is so constituted that his internal sentiment is ripened to consummation only when it has acquired an outward shape. He therefore who truly and heartily hates sin, confesses it with joyful pain; with pain, because it is his own sin; but with a joyful pain, because after confession it ceases to belong to him. It is a well-known fact that criminals have often confessed their sins during sleep, or during a drunken or crazy fit; and many, unable to endure the remorse of conscience, have delivered themselves up to justice and confessed their sin publicly. And what are all the immoral books that now pollute society—the novels, the lewd poetry, and so on—what are they—other than a public confession of the crimes and wicked lives of their authors?

How great is, therefore, the folly of those who deny the necessity of confession!

While the celebrated Cardinal Cheverus was bishop of Boston, he was much beloved by Protestants as well as Catholics, on account of his great learning and virtues. It often happened that even Protestant ladies, of the most respectable families in Boston, came to consult him. They

told him their family troubles, their troubles of conscience, and asked his advice—precisely as Catholics do in confession. One day, a lady told the bishop that there was one doctrine of the Catholic Church which she disliked exceedingly, and which prevented her from becoming a Catholic, and that was the doctrine of confession. She could never bring herself to confess her sins : “Madam,” answered the bishop, smiling, “you say that you dislike confession, but your dislike is not perhaps as great as you imagine ; to tell you the truth, you have been really confessing to me this long time. You must know that confession is nothing else than the confiding of your troubles and failings to a priest, in order to obtain his advice, and to receive through him the forgiveness of your sins.”

What happened to this celebrated cardinal happens also to almost every priest. There are many noble-hearted souls created by God for a high purpose—created to shine amid the highest angels throughout all eternity. Their sensibilities are so keen that they seem born only to suffer and weep. Their path to heaven is indeed a path of thorns. Their griefs and yearnings are such that but few can understand them. God help these noble souls if they are deprived of the strength and consolations of the Catholic Church ! Out of the Church they must bear their anguish alone. In the hour of happiness, they were told that religion would console them in the hour of sorrow. And now the hour of sorrow has come. Whither shall they turn for strength and consolation ? To books—to the Bible ? But books are cold and wearisome ; their words are dead. Oh ! how these unhappy souls envy the penitent Magdalen, who could sit at the feet of Jesus and hear from his blessed lips the sweet words of pardon and

peace ! They turn to God in prayer, but God answers them not by the Urim and Thummin ; and, in their doubt and loneliness, they envy even the Jews of old. In vain do they listen for the voice of God, because God has appointed a voice to speak and answer in his name, but that voice is heard only within the Shepherd's fold ; and they are kept without the fold by the cruel enemy, so that the voice of the Shepherd cannot reach them.

What shall they do to find relief ? Are they to apply to the Protestant minister ? The Rev. Father Bakewell tells us that, while yet a Protestant, he felt a strong desire to confess his sins. This desire grew stronger and stronger every day, so that at last he felt very unhappy because he could not satisfy it. One day the Protestant minister, who had a special affection for Mr. Bakewell, noticed that something unusual was troubling the mind of his young friend. So he called him and asked him the cause of his sadness. "Reverend sir," said Mr. Bakewell, "I want to go to confession." "Nonsense," replied the minister, with a sneer ; and then a discussion ensued between the minister and his disciple. The minister resorted to all sorts of arguments to expel from Mr. Bakewell's mind what he termed Catholic notions, but all to no purpose. Mr. Bakewell was a man of sound judgment, and empty declamations could not satisfy him. At last, by an inconsistency which nothing could justify, the minister said to Mr. Bakewell : "Since you insist upon going to confession, the Book of Common Prayer declares that I have the power to hear you. I am ready." It was more than Mr. Bakewell could bear. "Sir," said he, "you have just told me that confession is absurd, contrary to the teaching of Christ ; that it is an invention of the priest, a source of immorality,—



and after all this, you expect to hear my confession ! Permit me to say that I will never confess to a man who has himself no faith in confession—this is too absurd ; I will apply to a priest ; for he believes, and I believe with him, that Christ has placed in his hands the twofold power of loosing and binding.” A few days after, Mr. Bakewell was received into the bosom of the Church.

Now, what are these unsolicited manifestations of Protestants made to a Catholic priest ? Are they not an evident proof of the undeniable fact that confession is a want of nature ? Nay, even all our would-be infidels have ever been compelled to acknowledge this fact. Many of their emphatic avowals regarding the efficacy of confession might be adduced. Nay, many infidels have oftentimes, but especially at the hour of death, had recourse to this consoling sacrament. Maupertuis, De Langle, Buffon, Montesquieu, La Harpe, etc., went to confession before their death with every sentiment of compunction and Christian piety. All the great standard-bearers of infidelity, during the past century, would have confessed their sins at their last hour had they not been hindered from so doing by their impious associates. Even D’Alembert himself expressed his desire of reconciling himself with his God. Condorcet, his false friend, who shut out from the dying man the pastor of St. Germain, satanically congratulated himself upon such a triumph. “ Oh ! ” said he, “ were I not present, he would have flinched like the rest of them.”

Diderot was in the best dispositions possible : he had frequent interviews with the parish-priest of St. Sulpice, but his friends (?) hastened to take him to the country, in order to save the philosophical body from the shame, as they called it, of his conversion. Voltaire went to con-

fession during many of his attacks of sickness ; but, at his last hour, his chamber-door was closed against the chaplain of St. Sulpice, who was thus prevented from going to his bedside ; and Voltaire died in such a terrible paroxysm of fury that Marshal de Richelieu, who was present at his death, exclaimed, “ Really, this sight is sickening ; it is insupportable ! ” Listen to what his Protestant physician M. Trochin, says of it : “ Figure to yourself the rage and fury of Orestes, and you will still have but a feeble image of the fury of Voltaire in his last agony. It would be well if all the infidels of Paris were present. Oh ! the fine spectacle that would have met their eyes ! ”

But you will say, perhaps : “ Oh ! I am willing to confess my sins to God, but not to the Catholic priest.” St. Thomas of Villanova answers this objection : The eternal Father has given all judgment to his Son, for he is appointed Judge of the living and the dead ; and to him, therefore, is man to render an account of his sins. But, Christ, before ascending to heaven, delegated to his priests his power, and declared, in express terms, that they have the power to bind and to loose. Oh ! could you but understand what a great benefit, what a great mercy this is. (Dominica III. Quad.) “ Let no one say to me,” says St. Augustine : “ ‘ I do penance in my heart ; I confess all my sins to God, and to God alone, who was present when I committed sin. It is he who must forgive me.’ In vain, then, was it said to the apostles, ‘ Whose sins you shall forgive they are forgiven them, and whose sins you shall retain they are retained ! ’ The Church, then, has received the keys to no purpose ; you thus make a mockery of the Gospel.” To give the priest the power to forgive sins, and yet not to oblige any one to confess to him would indeed

be making a mockery of the priest. How can the priest forgive a sin without knowing it? And how can he know the sin unless the sinner himself confesses it. In the sacrament of confession, the priest is a physician and a judge. He is a physician, and consequently he must know the nature of the malady that afflicts the soul before he can cure it. He is a judge, and must consequently know what and how he has to judge.

What would you say of a judge who, without examining the cases brought before him, without questioning either the plaintiff or the defendant, would, at random, condemn one to be sent to prison, another to be hanged, and order another to be set at liberty? Would you not think such a judge most unjust? What, then, should you think of a priest who would absolve one and refuse to absolve another, without asking any questions, without even listening to the penitent, but merely following his own blind caprice? Would not such a priest be guilty of grievous injustice? But it is precisely thus that every priest would be forced to act were Christians not strictly bound to confess all their sins to him.

As no one is foolish enough to say, "I will go to God, and to God alone, for the remission of original sin,—I will send my children to God alone instead of sending them to the baptismal font,"—so, let no one be so foolish as to say, "I will go to God alone for the forgiveness of actual sin." As the former is forgiven only by means of baptism, so is the latter forgiven only by means of the Sacrament of Penance. Do all the good you can, distribute all you have among the poor, scourge yourself to blood every day, fast daily on bread and water, pray as long and as much as you are able, shed floods of tears on account of your

sins—do all this, and yet, if you have not the firm will to confess your sins, “you will,” says St. Augustine, “be damned for not having been willing to confess them. Open therefore your lips, and confess your sins to the priest. Confession alone is the true gate to heaven.”

St. Bonaventure relates that one of his brethren in religion was considered a saint by every one who knew him. He was seen praying in every place. He never spoke a word. In order not to be obliged to break silence, he made his confession only by signs. When St. Francis heard of this, he said: “Such conduct is no sign of sanctity. Know that this brother is a child of perdition. The devil has tied his tongue in order that he may not confess his sins in the manner he ought.” The words of the saint were soon verified. This unhappy man soon after left the convent and died a bad death.

For him, then, who has grievously sinned after baptism, there is no other means left of obtaining God’s pardon than to confess his sins to the priest. This the devil, the great enemy of our souls, knows well—hence his artifices to keep men from confession. When the Prodigal Son arose at last to return to his loving father, the tempter stood beside him and said: “What are you doing? You cannot go back to your father, in that plight. You are all in rags. Your father will be ashamed of you. He will not own you. Besides the distance is too great. You will lose your way. You will be attacked by robbers and wild beasts. Moreover, you are now too weak and sickly, you will faint and die on the way. Wait yet a few days longer. This famine will not last always. You will have better times, by and by. If you go back to your father, you will be scolded and treated even more harshly than before. If you go back,



now, every one will say that you are a coward—every one will laugh at you.” O how cunning is Satan! It is thus that this infernal spirit always tries to keep the poor sinner from returning to God, his heavenly Father.

There is a man who is not yet a Catholic, though inclined to become one. The devil makes him believe that confession is not a divine institution, but an invention of men; that it is even blasphemous to say and believe that man can forgive sins; that confession is too difficult, and that therefore a God of infinite goodness could not oblige man to confess his sins to the priest; that a secret confession made to God alone is all that is required.

There is a Catholic who has stayed away from confession for thirty, forty, or fifty years. At last he makes up his mind to go to confession. But the devil comes and whispers in his ear: “Oh! there is no hope for you. You have stayed away too long from confession. Your sins are too great and too numerous. You cannot obtain forgiveness. Besides, you will never be able to remember all your sins. It is useless for you to go to confession.”

There is a young woman who has been leading a worldly life. She has been keeping dangerous company. She sometimes reads sentimental novels and love-stories. She hears a sermon; her conscience is roused; she wishes to make a good confession. But the devil comes to her and says: “What are you going to do? The priests are too strict. Do not go near them. They will make you promise a great many things; and then, after the confession, you will break your promises, and you will be worse than before.

There is another unhappy soul. She has been for years making bad confessions and sacrilegious commu-

nions. At last she wishes to make a good confession, to tell everything honestly; but the devil comes and whispers in her ear: "Oh! what will the priest think of you if you tell these horrid sins? The priest never heard such sins before. He will be horrified—he will scold you."

In using such artifices to keep men from confession, the devil acts as Holofernes did at the siege of Bethulia. Seeing that he could not take the city by storm, Holofernes destroyed all the water-conduits. Thus the inhabitants, for want of water, saw themselves forced to surrender. The devil knows that, after baptism, the Sacrament of Penance is the only channel through which the divine grace of reconciliation flows upon the sinner. The devil knows that the sinner remains in his power as long as he can make him doubt of the necessity of confession, or can induce him to stay away from it altogether, or at least to make a bad confession. The devil knows well how true are the words of our Saviour: "Whose sins you shall retain, they are retained"—that is, they will not be forgiven for all eternity. How many souls are now burning in hell for not having believed in the necessity of confession, for having put off confession too long, or for having made bad confessions!

The Rev. Father Furniss, C. SS. R., relates that there was a certain gentleman living in Yorkshire, in the North of England. He led a very wicked life, and he knew that those who lead wicked lives deserve to go to hell. He wished to be bad during his lifetime, and still he did not want to go to hell when he died. So he began to think how he might gratify his passions and still save himself from hell, after all. He thought that he had found out a way to save his soul after leading a bad life. When I am dying,

he thought, I will repent and send for the priest, and make my confession ; and then all will be right. But then he remembered that if he had to send for the priest when he was dying, perhaps the priest might not be at home ; or, perhaps, his illness might be very sudden, and the priest could not come soon enough to hear his confession. He was frightened when he remembered that he might die before the priest could arrive. So he thought of another plan. He would get a priest to come and live always in the house with him, so that at any moment he could send for the priest. This thought pleased him very much, for he felt sure that if a priest was always living in his house he should be quite safe. But he forgot those words, "As people live, so shall they die." He forgot that he was offending God very much, and that, after all, how we shall die depends entirely on God.

A year or two after this, his last illness came ; and it came upon him very suddenly, when he was not in the least expecting it. He felt that he was dying, so he told his servants to go and fetch the priest to hear his confession. The priest was in the house, and the servants went directly to find him. They went, first of all, to the priest's room, which was next to the room in which the gentleman lay dying. The servants, not finding the priest in his own room, went through the whole house, from the highest to the lowest room, but could not find him anywhere. They called out his name all over the house, but there was no answer to their call. So they went back to their master, and told him that the priest was nowhere to be found. Then the gentleman saw how he had been deceiving himself ; despair came into his heart, and he died without hope of salvation.

A few moments after he had died the servants happened to go again into the priest's room, and there they saw the priest reading the prayers in his office-book. "How long," they said, "has your reverence been here?" "I have been here all the morning." "Did you not go out of the room at any time?" "No," said the priest, "I have not been out for one moment." "Did you not, then, see us come into this room two or three times, or hear us calling out your name?" "No," said the priest, "I did not see any one come into this room, or hear any one call out my name."—*As people live, so shall they die.*

The duty of confessing our sins seems to many a hard one, and yet, after death, it will be much harder for them to go to hell for not having confessed their sins. Listen to the words of the holy Church: "If any one says that it is not necessary to confess all and every mortal sin, even the most secret sins—all that one can call to mind after a diligent examen—let the same be anathema; let him be accursed." This alone is sufficient proof for every good Catholic; for the voice of the Church is the voice of God. There is, then, no other alternative. We must either confess our sins or burn in hell.

If we have followed the Prodigal Son in his sins, let us follow him also in his repentance. The Prodigal Son made up his mind to return to his father, no matter what it would cost. He was sorry for what he had done; he was determined to make reparation, to the best of his power. No evil companion, no suggestion of the devil, could prevail on him to stay any longer in that strange country—in the state of mortal sin. He was determined to make his confession to his father and obtain forgiveness. We, too, must show a firm determination, and say to ourselves: No



matter what it may cost ; no matter what the neighbors may say ; no matter what my friends may say, I am determined, with God's help, to make a good confession and to give up this life of sin.

Let us be wise, and let us be wise in time—let us confess our sins in time, for, in the world to come, there is no one to hear our confession and give us absolution. No ! not even the apostles can do so. It is only in this world that we can find a created being who has power to forgive the sinner, who can free him from the chains of sin and hell ; and that extraordinary being is the *priest*, the Catholic priest. “ Who can forgive sins, except God ? ” was the question which the Pharisees sneeringly asked. “ Who can forgive sins ? ” is the question which the Pharisees of the present day also ask ; and the answer is : There is a man on earth that can forgive sins, and *that* man is the Catholic priest.

There lived in the city of Antwerp, in Belgium, a certain nobleman who had, in his youth, the misfortune to fall into a very grievous sin. Day and night his conscience tortured him, yet he could not prevail on himself to confess this sin ; death, even hell itself, did not seem to him so terrible as such a confession. One day, he was present at a sermon which gave him much consolation. The priest said, among other things, that “ one is not obliged to confess those sins which he has entirely forgotten.” The nobleman now did all in his power to forget this sin. He was rich ; and so he cast himself into the whirl of gay amusements—every pleasure, lawful and unlawful, was enjoyed ; he sought to bury his sin beneath a mountain of new sins ; but all in vain ! Far above the sweet music, far above the gay song and the merry laugh, louder than

all, rose the voice of his conscience, and amidst the gayest crowds he carried a hell in his heart.

He now tried another plan. He began to travel. He traveled over many lands; he saw everything that was quaint and beautiful. A change of clime, he thought, would bring about a change of heart; but he was sadly disappointed. Every day he saw new sights; without, every thing was new and changing, but within—in his soul—was ever that dead, dreary sameness; for he carried himself with him everywhere—everywhere that wicked deed haunted him. The blue skies and the sunny lands smiled not for him; his guilty conscience cast a gloomy shadow on all he beheld.

Wearied and heart-sick, he returned to his native city. Here he applied himself earnestly to study, and thought to beguile his soul into forgetfulness. He dived into the abstractions of mathematics and philosophy, he soared aloft and calculated the courses of the stars, he listened to the lectures of the most learned professors,—but all in vain. Every book he opened seemed to tell him of his sin. The voice of his professor sounded in his ear; but far louder, deep down in his soul, sounded the voice of his conscience.

The unhappy man was at last almost driven into despair. Another sermon, however, gave him new courage. He heard that “charity covereth a multitude of sins,” “that God can never despise a contrite and humble heart.” He heard that good works, alms-deeds, as also perfect contrition, obtain from God the forgiveness of our sins. He now applied himself with all the fervor of his soul to the practice of good works. He spent whole nights in prayer, he fasted long and frequently, he performed the most

rigorous penances, he bestowed liberal alms on the poor, he visited the prison and the hospital, he assisted and consoled the suffering and dying ; but, though he consoled many and many a one, there was no consolation for himself. Every moment his conscience upbraided him : “ You must do the one, and the other you must not omit ”—you must do good works, but you must also confess your sins !

The unhappy nobleman had now tried all that man could do ; had tried every means but the only right one, and had tried all in vain. There was but one resource yet left. He was weary of life and was resolved to end it by suicide. He stepped into his carriage and drove off to his country-seat. As he passed along the road he overtook a venerable old man, whom he recognized as a religious priest. The nobleman immediately stopped his carriage and invited the aged priest to enter. The priest, in order to please the nobleman, yielded to his request. The good old religious was very friendly and talkative. They spoke of various things, and the conversation soon turned upon religious matters. The priest spoke at length of the clearly-distinctive notes of the holy Catholic Church. He spoke with a joyous pride of her holy sacraments, especially of that most touching proof of God’s infinite mercy—the holy sacrament of confession. “ What hope would there be for the poor sinner,” cried he, with enthusiasm—“ what hope would there be, were it not for confession ? Yes, yes ; confession is the last plank after shipwreck ; confession is the sinner’s last and only hope of salvation.” At these words the nobleman started up as if stung by a serpent. “ What ! ” cried he, “ what is that you say ? Do you know me ? How do you know me ? ”

The priest was quite astonished at this sudden outburst, and excused himself, saying: "My dear sir, I have never before had the honor of knowing you. If I have inadvertently said anything to wound your feelings, you must excuse me. Old people, you know, are generally talkative. However, if you should have any troubles of conscience, you may be sure I would only be too happy to assist you." "But," cried the nobleman, excited, "I do not wish to confess!" "Oh! then," said the priest, quietly, "if you do not wish to confess, why then—never mind it. You know there are other means." These last words fell as a ray of sunshine upon the dreary and clouded soul of the nobleman. "There are other means," thought he, and he began to breathe freely once more. He now felt the greatest confidence in the good old priest, promised him solemnly that he would be willing to undergo any penance if he would only free him from the obligation of confession. They soon arrived at the country-seat, and the priest was obliged to stay over night. They passed the evening in agreeable conversation. The hour for retiring came, but the nobleman would not suffer the priest to retire to rest until he had revealed to him those "other means" of which he had spoken. The priest now advised him to remain awake yet for a few hours, to enliven his confidence in God, and to examine his conscience carefully. "Not, of course," said he, "in order to confess, for that you do not wish to do, but that you may call to mind all your sins, and be truly sorry for them. To-morrow morning, I will tell you the rest."

You may imagine that the noblemen slept little that night. Early the next morning, he was at the priest's door. "I have complied faithfully with your injunctions,"



said he. "What have I to do next?" "Oh! all you have to do now," answered the priest, smiling, "is to come with me into the garden." They stepped forth into the cool morning air. "Well, how are you now?" said the priest, in a kind tone. "Do you not feel better?" "Better!" answered the noblemen, "oh! no; far from it." "But," said the priest, "perhaps you forgot something in your examen of conscience. Did you think of this sin, and this, and this?" And so he went on gradually through the long train of sins of which the human heart is capable. He descended into the deepest depths of human degradation, and named even those sins that are so dark and shameful that one is afraid to acknowledge them even to himself.

Scarcely had the good priest named a certain sin when the nobleman became greatly agitated. He hid his face in his hands and sobbed aloud. "Yes! That's it! That's it! That is the abominable, the accursed sin that I cannot—that I will not confess." The priest could not help weeping at witnessing the struggle of this poor soul. He consoled the nobleman, and told him that there was no need of confessing it any more. "You have confessed already," said he; "let it now be forgotten. You can include whatever other sins you remember, and now kneel down and receive the absolution." The nobleman fell on his knees and wept like a child. He kissed again and again the hand of the aged priest; he arose, at last, with a heart as light as that of an angel who never knew aught of sin. He felt as if he stood in a new creation. Never before did the sun shine so brightly; never before did the heavens look so blue; never before did the birds sing so sweetly. His happiness was a foretaste of heaven.

**3. What must one do in danger of death, if he cannot make his confession ?**

*He must earnestly wish to confess his sins to the priest, and try to be sorry for having offended so good a God.*

We cannot be saved unless we do the will of God. Heaven is the reward of those who, on earth, believed and did all that God the Father, has taught, through His well-beloved Son Jesus Christ, for our salvation and sanctification. "Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doth the will of my Father who is in heaven." (Matt. vii., 21.) He, therefore, who, after baptism, has grievously sinned against the will of God, cannot be saved unless he truly repents of his sinful conduct and confesses his sins to a priest. By sincere repentance he stands again on the side of God, and the Lord receives him again into his friendship.

If, however, confession is impossible, then the ardent desire of confession accompanied with true faith in Jesus Christ and perfect contrition for sin, will suffice to cancel our sins. The Lord, in his infinite mercy, accepts the good will for the deed. In this case, the words of the Blessed Virgin are verified : "The Lord hath filled the hungry with good things." (Luke i., 35.) God bestows heaven itself upon those who die with the sincere desire of confession, and who are at the same time truly sorry for their sins. We read of a remarkable instance of this truth in the *Glories of Mary*, written by St. Alphonsus. It is related in the life of Sister Catherine, an Augustinian nun, that in the place where the servant of God dwelt, there lived a woman named Mary, who, in her youth, was a great sinner, and obstinately persevered in her evil habits, even to extreme old age. On this account,

she was banished by her fellow-citizens and forced to live in a cave beyond the limits of the place. There she died in a state of loathsome corruption, abandoned by all, and without even receiving the sacraments. She was, therefore, buried in a field, like a beast. Now Sister Catherine, who was accustomed to recommend earnestly to God the souls of those who had died in the neighborhood, after learning the miserable death of this unhappy woman, did not think of praying for her; she naturally concluded that the wretched woman was lost. Four years passed by. One day a soul from purgatory appeared to the pious nun, and said: "Sister Catherine, how unhappy is my fate! you commend to God the souls of all those who die, and for my soul alone you have had no pity." "And who are you?" said the servant of God. "I am," answered she, "that poor Mary who died in the cave." "How! are you saved?" exclaimed Sister Catherine. "Yes, I am saved," she said, "by the mercy of the Virgin Mary." "And, how?" asked the nun. "When I saw death drawing near," answered the soul, "and finding myself laden with sins, and abandoned by all, I turned to the mother of God and said to her: 'O Lady, thou art the refuge of the abandoned, behold me now deserted by all; thou art my only hope, thou alone canst help me; have pity on me.' The holy Virgin obtained for me the grace of making an act of true contrition, which always implies the desire of confession; I died and am saved, and my Queen has also obtained for me the grace that my pains should be abridged, and that I should, by suffering intensely for a short time, pass through that purification which otherwise would last many years. A few masses only are needed to obtain my release from purgatory; I pray thee cause them to be offered for

me, and I promise to pray to God and Mary for thee." Sister Catherine immediately caused the masses to be said for her, and that soul, after a few days, appeared to her again, more brilliant than the sun, and said to her, "I thank thee, Sister Catherine: behold, I am now going to heaven to sing the mercy of God and to pray for thee."

Although it be true that the sincere desire of confession may, in certain cases, supply the want of oral confession, nevertheless, no one who is in mortal sin should put off his confession even for a single day; for such delay is always dangerous.

It is related in the Life of St. Louis, king of France, that God often gave him the grace of being able to penetrate the secrets of hearts. One day, whilst passing through one of the provinces of his kingdom, he came to a shepherd who was minding his flock. He approached him with his usual kindness, looked at him with interest, put some questions to him, and at length said: "My son, I know the bad state of your conscience; it is three years since you made a sincere confession; I beg of you, as you value your soul, to delay no longer in returning to God; let me take you back to the fold of the good Shepherd, for death is already at your door. God is willing to forgive you all your sins." The shepherd was amazed: he trembled at the words of the king; he made a strict examination of his conscience, and confessed his sins with sincere contrition, after having earnestly besought the Lord to give him that grace. Three days after, he died a sudden death, in the very field where he was feeding his flock. (Schmid et Belet, *Cat. Hist.* iii., 171.)

The greatest misfortune that can befall a sinner is to die



suddenly in his sins. Hence we should always make our confession as if it were to be the last of our life.

#### **4. Are we also bound to confess our venial sins ?**

*No ; but it is most advisable to confess them.*

“There are persons,” says St. Alphonsus, “who, when they are about to commit a sin, doubt whether it is mortal or venial. By acting in such a state of doubt, they really commit a mortal sin, because they expose themselves to the danger of offending God grievously. Hence they are obliged to confess such sins, at least as they are before God.”

Scrupulous persons, however, who have doubts about everything, must follow another rule. They must obey their confessor. When he tells them to despise their scruples and to take no notice of them, they should obey him, and obey promptly ; otherwise, they will make little or no progress in virtue. (Catechism.)

“But as to real venial sins,” says St. Alphonsus, “it is useful to confess them, because the absolution of the confessor remits them. But there is no obligation of confessing them ; for, according to the Council of Trent, the pardon of venial sins may be obtained by other means besides confession : as, for instance, by acts of contrition and of charity, or by saying the *Our Father* with devotion.” That it is very good, useful and praiseworthy to confess our venial sins is the doctrine of all theologians. It has, moreover, always been the practice of the saints. All the great masters of the spiritual life recommend this practice to all who wish to make rapid progress in Christian perfection.

Another reason why it is good for every one to confess

his venial sins is, because, by so doing, he will be better able, at the hour of death, to withstand the fierce assaults of his hellish foes. At that last dread moment, the devils avail themselves of even the slightest advantage. They bring up before the dying man, all his sins—mortal and venial—in order to throw his poor soul into despair; and, if they chance to find some sin that has not been confessed, even though it be not a mortal sin, they exaggerate and magnify it and make it appear greater than it really is, in order to drive the sinner to despair.

Venerable Bede relates, that a certain soldier, who was a great favorite of King Coered, was often exhorted by him to go to confession, as the king was aware of the ungodly life the man was leading, and with how many sins his soul was defiled. But the soldier parried all the pious king's endeavors, by promising to fulfil his duty at some more convenient season. Being at length seized with a dangerous disease, the king, for the love he bore the soldier, went in person to visit him, and profited by the occasion to exhort him anew to settle his accounts with God by an exact confession. The sick man replied that he meant to confess on his recovery, because he feared that, if he should confess before getting well, his friends might say that he did it out of fear of death. The king most graciously returned to pay him a second visit, and on his entering the room the sick man began to exclaim: "Sire, what do you want with me now! You can give me no help!" "What folly is this?" replied the king, in an indignant tone. "No folly," replied the dying man, "but the very truth. Know, that but a few minutes ago there came into the room two youths, of most engaging appearance, who presented me with a book, beautiful indeed to look at, but very, very small in size. In

it I saw the list of my good deeds registered; but, good God! how few and how trifling they were! Behind these youths appeared a group of infernal spirits, horrible to behold. One of them bore on his shoulders a vast volume, of great weight, which contained, written in dread characters, the list of my sins. I read there not only my grievous but even my most trivial offences, even those which I committed in thought. At the first appearance of this frightful vision, the chief of the infernal crew said to these two angelic youths: 'What are you staying here for, since you have neither part nor lot in this man who is already our prey?' 'Take him, then,' replied the latter, 'and lead him whither the burden of his iniquities is weighing him down.' At these words they disappeared. Then one demon struck me a blow with a fork on the head, another on the feet, which makes me suffer fearful torments; even now I feel the pain penetrating into my very vitals." Having said this, he breathed his last most miserably. (*Hist. Eccl.*, lib. v., c. 14.)

See how the devils reproached this wretched man with even the sins he had committed in thought, although they were well aware that he was laden with a multitude of the most grievous sins, which would have sufficed for his damnation. Certain it is, that the enemy has often made use of venial sins, at the hour of death, as a powerful weapon against the servants of God. Ecclesiastical history bears witness to the truth of this assertion.

Let us, therefore, reveal to our confessor, all our spiritual infirmities, all our temptations, and all our evil inclinations; by doing so, we shall receive particular lights and graces from God.

"As often as you go to confession," says Father Crasset, "you honor the wisdom of God by avowing your own

ignorance. You honor his power by revealing your weakness. You make suitable amends to his greatness and majesty which you have offended. You give to his justice the satisfaction which he demands. You humble your pride. You turn away the chastisements that you have merited, and which God had prepared for you. You sacrifice to God that which you love the most, your own self. You purify your soul. You apply a sovereign remedy to your wounds. You acquire a particular right to the grace of God. You strike at the root of your vices. You secure your salvation. You find peace and repose for your conscience. O, happy souls that wash themselves often in the sacred laver of the Sacrament of Penance ! They can, in truth, sing constantly with the holy prophet this beautiful canticle of love and gratitude. ‘Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that he has done for thee. Who forgiveth all thy iniquities ; who healeth all thy diseases ; who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with mercy and compassion ; who satisfieth thy desire with good things : thy youth shall be renewed like the eagle’s.’ ”

### 5. When is our confession good ?

*Confession to be good must be : 1, entire, or a confession of at least all our mortal sins, with the necessary circumstances ; 2, sincere, or a confession of sins without concealing or excusing them.*

A famous missionary in Italy was one day preaching to an immense multitude. He stood in the open air, under the clear blue sky ; the wide field around him was thronged with the thousands who had come to hear him. It was



summer, and the lofty trees around with their rich foliage made an agreeable shade. Suddenly the missionary paused in the midst of his discourse. A dead silence fell upon all: all eyes were riveted upon the speaker. There he stood, his arms extended, his eyes raised to heaven; he was rapt in ecstasy. A moment more and the missionary broke the solemn stillness, and cried aloud in a voice so strong and awful that it caused the ears of his hearers to tingle, and penetrated to the very marrow of their bones: "Oh! my brethren, how many, many souls are damned! Just now God opened my eyes, and I saw the souls of men falling into hell as the dead leaves fall in the harvest-time." And, lo! as he spoke, a mighty wind arose, and the green leaves fell from the trees, though it was yet summer, and the earth was strewn with the fallen leaves, and all who heard him were filled with unspeakable terror.

Were God to open our eyes this moment, we would also see how the souls of men, even now, are falling into hell thick as the snow-flakes in winter. And why is this? Did not the Son of God come on earth to save all men? Did not our blessed Lord pour out the last drop of his heart's blood to rescue all men from hell? Did he not make the way to heaven so easy that all we have to do to be saved is to will it earnestly? This is all most true, and yet even now the souls of men are falling into hell. And why? Because there is scarcely one in the world gifted with reason who has never committed a sin; there are few, very few, who have never committed a mortal sin; and there are millions who never confess their sins, never repent of them; and millions again who confess them, indeed, but who do not confess them all, or who do not confess them as they ought.

1. In order to obtain the forgiveness of our sins in confession, the confession must be *entire* : that is, we must confess all our mortal sins, with the necessary circumstances, as far as we can remember them. He who is truly sorry for his sins is most willing to confess them all ; he is even apt to confess them more minutely than is really necessary.

This confession of all the mortal sins which we can remember is strictly necessary. “ But,” you will say, “ if I am sorry for my sins, if I do penance for them during my whole life, if I go into a desert and live there on herbs and roots, and sleep on the bare ground, will not Almighty God then pardon me ? ” “ You may,” says St. Alphonsus, “ do as much penance as you please ; but if you do not confess every mortal sin which you remember, you cannot obtain pardon. He who has offended God by mortal sin can preserve himself from hell only by confessing his sin.”

A young person of eighteen, who lived in Florence, in Italy, had the misfortune to fall into a great sin. No sooner was the sin committed than she was tortured with remorse. “ Oh ! ” said she to herself, “ how shall I have the courage to tell that sin to my confessor ? What will he think of me ? What will he say to me ? ” She went, nevertheless, to confession, but dared not confess that sin. She received absolution, and even went to communion in that state. This horrible sacrilege increased still more her agony and remorse. She felt as if she were in hell, tormented day and night by the reproaches of her conscience, and by the well-founded fear that she would be lost forever. In the hope of quieting her conscience, she gave herself up to tears and groans, to continual prayer, to the most rigorous fasts, and to the hardest penances ; but all was in vain.

The remembrance of her first crime and her sacrileges harassed and pursued her incessantly. Her soul was in an abyss of sorrow and bitterness. In the height of her interior anguish the thought came to her mind to go into a convent and there make a general confession. She finally entered a convent and commenced her general confession ; but still, enslaved by false shame, she related the hidden sin in such a garbled, confused way that her confessor did not understand her. She continued, however, to receive communion in that sad state. Her trouble at last became so great that life appeared insupportable. To relieve her heart, tormented as it was, she redoubled her prayers, mortifications and good works. The nuns in the convent took her for a saint, and finally elected her as their superioress. Having become superioress, this wretched hypocrite continued to lead outwardly a penitential and exemplary life, embittered still by the reproaches of her conscience.

At length, she made the firm resolution to confess her sin in her last illness, and this came sooner than she expected. On her death-bed she undertook to make a general confession, with the honest intention of confessing the sin she had hitherto concealed. But shame again overcame her, and she neglected to accuse herself of that sin. She still consoled herself with the thought that she would declare it a few moments before her death ; but she had neither the time nor the power to do so. Her fever increased, she became delirious, and died unconscious. Some days after, the religious of the monastery were praying for the repose of the soul of this supposed saint. Suddenly, she appeared to them, in a hideous form, and said : “ Sisters, pray not for me ; it is useless. I am

damned!" "How?" cried one of the religious; "you are damned, after leading such a holy and penitential life! Is it possible?" "Alas! yes. I am damned for having, all my life, concealed in confession a mortal sin which I committed at the age of eighteen." Having said this she disappeared, leaving behind her an intolerable stench, the visible sign of the sad state in which she was. This story is related by St. Antoninus, archbishop of Florence, who wrote in the fifteenth century. (Abbé Favre, *Le Ciel ouvert*. 45.)

Such, then, is the melancholy end of all those who do not confess all the mortal sins which they remember. They remain enemies of God; they will have to suffer a hell in this world, and a hell in the next.

But you will say: "I feel so much ashamed, I cannot confess my sins." I answer, if you were obliged to confess your sins to an angel, a bright and beautiful spirit from heaven, then indeed you might hesitate, you might feel afraid and ashamed to tell all your shameful secret sins to a spirit so pure, so holy. But you have to confess not to an angel, but to a poor, sinful man like yourself; to a fellow-creature, subject to temptation like yourself, to one who stands perhaps even more in need of God's grace than you do, for his duties, his responsibilities, his dangers are far greater than yours. Why, then, should you be afraid to tell your sins to the priest? What is there in the priest that should cause you to fear? You feel ashamed? Well! is it not better to suffer a little shame now, than to endure unutterable shame on the day of judgment, and eternal shame in hell?

Tertullian, who lived in the second century, says: "There are many Christians who are ashamed to confess



their sins, thinking more about their shame and confusion than about their salvation. Though we hide something from men, can we hide it also from God? Which is better: to be damned for concealing your sins, or to be saved by confessing them?"

One day, a certain priest saw the devil standing near a confessional, while the priest was hearing confessions. "What are you doing here?" asked the priest. "I am here to make restitution," answered the devil. "I give back to the sinner the fear and shame which I took from him when he committed sin." This is always a very successful trick of Satan. When he sees any one about to commit sin, he takes away from him all fear and shame; but, as soon as he has committed the sin, the devil gives him back all the fear and shame he took from him, and thus drives the unhappy sinner to despair.

When the wolf wishes to carry off a lamb, he seizes his helpless victim by the throat, so that it cannot warn the shepherd, and cry for help. It is thus that the infernal wolf, the devil, acts with souls. He is afraid that they will tell their sins and thereby escape from his clutches; he therefore holds them by the throat, so that they cannot make a full, candid confession.

"There are," says St. Anthony of Padua, "many doors through which the demon can enter the castle of our soul; but there is only one door through which he can be expelled. He can enter by the five senses, but he can be expelled only by the mouth: that is, by a good confession. When, therefore, the demon has obtained possession of the castle of the soul, the first thing he does is to barricade the only door by which he can be driven out—that is, he tempts the sinner to conceal his sins; for as long as this

door remains closed, he feels secure in his possession. (Dom. iii., in Quad.)

We read in the *Magnum Speculum*, that a person possessed by the devil was led to a holy man, to whose questions the demon answered: "There are three of us in this sinner. I am called *Claudens Cor* (the closer of the heart); my office is to prevent men from having contrition; but if I fail, then my brother, called *Claudens Os* (the closer of the mouth), endeavors to prevent him from confessing his sins; but if he confesses and is converted, my third brother here, named *Claudens Bursam* (the closer of the purse), labors to prevent him from making restitution, filling his mind with the fear of poverty; and he succeeds more frequently than either of us."

The famous Socrates was one day going along the street, and happening to pass a house of ill-fame, he saw the door open and one of his own disciples coming out. As the young man beheld Socrates, he was filled with shame and went back into the house. But Socrates went to the door and called him: "My son," said he, "leave this house instantly; and know that it is indeed a disgrace to enter such a house, but it is an honor to leave it." The advice of Socrates to his frail disciple is also a wholesome advice for Christians. It is indeed a shame, a dishonor, to commit a sin; but it is a glory, an honor to confess it. By sin, we become enemies of God and slaves of the devil; but, by confession, we again become children of God and heirs of heaven.

Suppose you were afflicted with a very dangerous cancer; would you be ashamed to go to the physician and tell him about it? Would you not suffer him even to probe the painful wound? Certainly, you would; and why? Be-

cause life is very dear to you, and you are willing to endure the greatest pain and the greatest humiliation rather than lose your life. And will you not suffer a little pain, a little humiliation, to save your immortal soul? Can you not endure a little shame, in order to free your soul from the horrible cancer of mortal sin?

Suppose you owed a hundred millions of dollars to a certain king. And suppose the king, being moved with pity, forgives you the whole debt, on condition that you go to one of his ministers and acknowledge your indebtedness. Now would you not feel only too happy to pay off your enormous debt, on so easy a condition? Would you not go at once and comply most cheerfully with such a condition? But do you not know that by mortal sin, you become indebted to God's justice? And this debt is so great that all the money in the world would not suffice to pay it; all the good works of the just on earth and of all the saints in heaven would not be sufficient to cancel it; nay, even the fierce fires of hell, though burning throughout all eternity, can never destroy a single mortal sin. Mortal sin is a debt which makes us so hideous in the sight of God that, were we permitted to enter with it into heaven, we should at once destroy the bliss of that beautiful abode. See, now, how good the Lord is! All that he requires of you, to cancel this debt, is to go to the priest, his lawful minister, and acknowledge to him the full amount of your debt. Can you honestly say that this condition is too hard? Indeed, God shows himself extremely indulgent in granting pardon on such easy terms. He could certainly have made the conditions for obtaining pardon far more difficult.

Confession is the great, the wonderful invention of God's infinite mercy. There have been many sinners who entered

the confessional without the least intention of amending their lives ; many even went there only to mock the priest and to ridicule this divine institution ; yet many of these went away entirely changed. They entered as wolves, and went forth as lambs. The good priest spoke kindly to these sinners. His heart was filled with pity for them. He made them enter into themselves, and finally reconciled them with God.

It is said that St. Alphonsus never sent away a sinner without absolution. Now, it is morally certain that many a sinner came to him who was not properly disposed. But the saint spoke to the poor sinner with the utmost kindness ; he represented to him, in forcible language, the miserable condition of his soul, and the great danger in which he was of being damned forever. He inspired the sinner with a salutary fear of God's judgment, and, at the same time, he prayed to God to bestow on the unhappy sinner a true sorrow for his sins and a firm purpose of amendment.

Go, then, to confession, and go without fear ; ask the priest to be kind enough to help you make a good confession. If you experience a particular difficulty in confessing a certain sin, tell your confessor, and he will assist you. All that you have to do is to answer his questions honestly.

Suppose you fell into a deep pit, filled with fierce, venomous serpents, would you be ashamed to take hold of the rope which a kind friend let down in order to draw you out of that horrible place ? Would you not seize the rope with eagerness ? Would you not be forever thankful to the friend who delivered you from the poisonous fangs of these serpents ? Most certainly you would. And have you no thanks to offer your best and truest friend,



the priest of God? Will you not suffer him to deliver you from the poisonous fangs of those hellish serpents, that have been so long swarming in your soul? Will you not suffer the priest to free you from those demons of hell, that for years have been haunting you, have been tempting and tormenting you day and night, sleeping and waking? Will you not suffer the priest to free you from the devils, who are ever trying so hard to deprive you of the glory and joys of heaven, and to drag you, with them, down into the flames of hell?

“But, oh!” you will say, “if I tell such a sin the priest will be scandalized and horrified. I am sure he never before heard such dreadful sins as mine. What will he think of me?”

What! the priest will be scandalized? Did you ever know of a physician who was scandalized or offended at a patient for being very sick? Why, the very fact that the patient is sick, is precisely the reason why the physician comes to him. If he were well, he would not need the physician. Now the priest is the physician of your soul, and it is precisely because your soul is sick that you stand so much in need of his assistance. A father always feels more compassion for a sick child than for one that is well.

“The priest never heard such sins before.” That is unfortunately, a sad mistake. The priest must study for many long years to prepare himself for the sacred ministry. Before he is ever permitted to enter the confessional, he must study for years in moral theology every possible sin that man can commit. He must study his own heart, and the knowledge of his own heart gives him an insight into the hearts of his fellow-men. He knows, from his own

experience, how strong are the human passions : how weak is the human heart. He knows every fold of the heart : its most secret desires, its hidden weakness, its natural tendency to evil. The priest has, moreover, a long experience in hearing confessions. It is his duty often to probe the inmost recesses of the human heart ; he has to become acquainted with sin in the most hideous and revolting forms. You need not fear, therefore, that the priest will be astonished at what you tell him ; and if he should seem astonished, it is not so much at your sins ; he is astonished rather that you have not fallen into even greater sins.

Ah, but you say, " If I tell such a shameful sin, what will the priest think of me ? He will have a bad opinion of me." By no means. On the contrary, the priest will honor you for your courage if you make a frank, honest confession. It is certain that it requires more courage to make a clear candid confession, than it does to brave death upon the battle-field. The courage of the soldier on the battle-field is mere animal courage. The horse and the mule, too, rush headlong into the very jaws of death : but the courage of him who confesses even his most secret sins, is moral courage,—it is sterling virtue. You will find men who can brave death on the battle-field, and yet they have not as much real, moral courage as a little school-girl ; they have not courage enough to go to confession ; they are cowards, they dare not. Many a young man, who thinks himself very brave, and who would be insulted if you called him a coward, is, after all, an arrant coward,—he dares not go to confession.

The priest will honor you if you make a sincere confession ; he will esteem you, he will even love you, for, by making a candid confession you show that you hate sin ;

you become a child of God and heir of heaven ; after confession your soul becomes bright and beautiful as an angel of God.

At the close of a mission, where St. Francis de Sales had spent day and night in hearing confessions, he wrote to St. Jane Frances de Chantal : “ Oh ! how great is my joy over the conversion of so many souls. I have been reaping, in smiles and in tears of love, amongst my dear penitents. O, Saviour of my soul ! how great was my joy to see, among others, a young man of twenty, brave and stout as a giant, return to the Catholic faith, and confess his sins in so holy a manner that it was easy to recognize the wonderful workings of divine grace leading him back to the way of salvation. I was quite beside myself with joy.”

At another time a great sinner overcame his natural repugnance and made a general confession to St. Francis de Sales, in which he detailed the many sins of his youth. The saint, charmed by the great humility with which the penitent performed this painful task, expressed to him his joy and satisfaction. “ You wish to console me,” said the penitent, “ because you cannot esteem such a guilty creature as I am.” “ You are mistaken,” answered the saintly bishop ; “ I would be a perfect Pharisee were I to look upon you as a sinner, after absolution. At the present moment your soul is, in my estimation, whiter than snow, and I am bound to love you for two reasons—the first, because of the confidence you have shown me by candidly opening your heart to me ; and the second, because, being the instrument of your new birth in Jesus Christ, you have become my son. And, as to my esteem for you, it equals the love that I bear you. By a miracle of the right hand

of God, I see you transformed, from a vessel of ignominy, to a vessel of honor and sanctification. Moreover, I should indeed be very insensible, did I not participate in the joy that the angels themselves feel, on account of the change wrought in your heart ; how I love that heart which now loves the God of all goodness !” The penitent went away so satisfied that ever after his greatest delight was to go to confession. (*Spirit of St. Francis de Sales.*) Such, too, is the joy of every priest, and such is the love he bears to every poor sinner who has sincerely confessed his sins.

But you will say : “ If I tell such horrid sins, the priest will scold me.” Ah ! could you but look into the priest’s heart, you would not judge him so harshly. The priest is indeed an enemy of sin, but he is the truest friend of the sinner. The priest knows very well how much it costs you to make a good confession. How often has your wife, or your mother, or your sister, or some kind friend, entreated and even scolded you before you would consent to go to confession ? How often has your conscience warned and terrified you before you would consent to confess ? The priest knows all this very well. He knows, too, how often you made up your mind to go to confession, how you lost courage and put off the confession till some other time. He knows all the enquiries you made, all the pains you took to find out an easy confessor, one who would not be too hard on you. The priest knows also how much time you spent in preparing for confession, in waiting for your turn at the confessional ; how you lost thereby a good day’s work, and were even in danger of losing your employment. The priest knows of all your sacrifices and struggles ; and do you think he will scold you or treat you harshly when you come to him in spite of all these obstacles ? Oh ! no. The



priest knows, from his own experience, how much it costs you to make a full and candid confession. He is a man like yourself; he has a human heart, human weaknesses, temptations like yourself. He, too, has to cast himself at the feet of a brother priest; he, too, has to confess his sins and abide by the decision of his confessor.

Our divine Saviour assures us that the angels of heaven rejoice over you when you give up sin and enter upon a life of penance. He says that "there is even more joy in heaven over a sinner doing penance than over ninety-nine just who need not penance." Now if the angels of heaven rejoice when you come repentant to confession, will not the heart of the priest rejoice when he sees you humbly kneeling before him? As the heart of a mother rejoices on finding her long-lost child, so does the heart of the priest rejoice when he sees the poor lost prodigal returning home at last.

"Oh!" you will say, "but perhaps the priest will speak of my sins, and reveal them to others."

Suppose you were to confess your sins to the wall, would you be afraid that your sins would be revealed? No, you would not. Now you may be just as certain that the sins you tell the priest will never be revealed. The priest is bound by the most sacred, the most solemn obligations; he is bound by every law, natural, ecclesiastical and divine—to observe the utmost secrecy with regard to every sin and imperfection that you reveal to him. He is not allowed to speak of your sins out of confession, even to yourself, unless you give him permission to do so.

This is a rule which admits of no exception. The priest must be ready to suffer every torture; he must sacrifice even life itself rather than reveal, in any way, even the least venial sin. The "seal of confession," as it is called,

extends not merely to all the sins mentioned in confession, but also to everything made known during confession, the manifestation of which would tend to make confession odious. Thus, if a person while preparing for confession, were to go to his confessor, in order to learn how to examine his conscience, or how to declare any class of sins,—or if he were to speak of his sins immediately after absolution,—or even if he came back after leaving the confessional and again referred to the sins he had confessed, as the confession virtually continues, the sins thus manifested would also fall under the seal of confession. Some persons seem to think that the confessor is not obliged to keep secret what he is told in the confessional, immediately after absolution. This is a great mistake, unless indeed, what is said has no reference whatever to the matter of confession. This strict obligation of perpetual secrecy applies not only to the confessor, but also to all others who have, accidentally or otherwise, acquired any knowledge through sacramental confession. For instance, he who has overheard a sin in confession is as strictly bound to keep it secret as the priest himself.

One of the greatest monsters that ever sat on a throne, was Wenceslaus IV., king of Bohemia. So great were his debaucheries that he was generally called by his subjects “Wenceslaus the drunkard.” As is almost always the case with wicked men, he became jealous of his wife. Being resolved to find out whether his suspicions were well grounded, he sent for the confessor of the queen. This confessor was the holy priest, St. John Nepomuck. The tyrant commanded the priest to reveal all that the queen had confessed to him. St. John answered firmly that such a thing was utterly impossible. The emperor tried

to win the saint by rich presents ; but the confessor spurned such a sacrilegious proposal. The emperor threatened him with imprisonment and death. The confessor answered : “ I can die, but I cannot break the seal of confession.” The tyrant ordered him to be put to the torture. The holy confessor was stretched on the rack, burning torches were applied to his side, he was commanded to reveal the queen’s confession ; but he only raised his eyes to heaven and repeated again and again the sweet names of Jesus and Mary. The tyrant, furious at seeing himself thus baffled, ordered the holy priest to be set at liberty. A few days after, St. John was crossing the bridge over the river Moldau, which flows through the city of Prague. It was night. The holy confessor noticed that some men were following him slowly. He recommended himself to God, and went on courage usly. When he had reached the middle of the bridge, just above the most rapid part of the current, the ruffians, who were following, rushed upon him, bound him hand and foot, and cast him into the river. There was none to witness the sacrilege ; but the all-seeing eye of God beheld it. And God soon revealed the murderous deed and proclaimed the sanctity of his servant. A thousand brilliant lights—like twinkling stars—appeared on the dark flood, and floated over the body of the glorious martyr. The people rushed in crowds to behold the wonder. The tyrant himself witnessed it from his palace-window. He could murder the glorious confessor, but he could not prevent the people from honoring him. Next morning the priests of the city, with the bishop at their head, followed by a vast concourse of people, went in solemn procession and carried the body of the brave martyr in triumph to the cathedral. The Church

now honors St. John of Nepomuck as a saint and martyr, and his blessed tongue, which refused to violate the seal of confession, is still fresh and incorrupt, after a lapse of more than three hundred years. Thus suffered and died St. John of Nepomuck, rather than break the seal of confession; and so must every Catholic priest suffer and die, rather than breathe a word of what he has heard in confession.

Every priest can say most truthfully with St. Augustine: "That which I know by confession is less known to me than that which I do not know at all." Yes, the breast of the priest, this angel of peace, is a sealed abyss which neither the fire nor the sword of tyrants can open. The law which shuts the lips of the confidant of our secrets is so strict that no interest in the world—neither the safety of an empire, nor even the safety of the priest's own life, nay, no loss or gain whatever—can ever authorize its violation.

As I have spoken of the seal of confession, I must also remark that this law of secrecy does not, strictly speaking, bind the penitent. He may speak of his own sins, and even sometimes of what his confessor has said to him, without being guilty of sacrilege. There are instances, however, when the penitent is strictly bound to observe silence. It often happens that the advice which the priest gives can be understood only by knowing all the facts of the case, and consequently by making known what he has said, a grievous wrong may be done to him, while he has no means of defending his character. Moreover, the admonition given to the penitent is intended for him alone, and might not be beneficial to another who is differently circumstanced. A skilful physician may be perfectly correct



in the remedy which he prescribes for a certain patient, and yet this same remedy may prove highly injurious to another. So it is with the admonitions of our spiritual physician. He, for instance, who is lukewarm and negligent should not apply to himself the advice which the confessor intended only for a scrupulous penitent ; otherwise he will fall into the same error as the sick man who takes the medicine intended for one whose ailment is totally different. A discreet penitent, therefore, will always observe silence in regard to what has been said in confession, unless there are clear and solid reasons for the contrary.

2. Confession must be *humble* and *sincere*.

“ A sinner at confession,” says St. Alphonsus, “ should imagine himself to be a criminal condemned to death, bound by as many chains as he has sins to confess ; he presents himself before the confessor, who holds the place of God, and who alone can loose his bonds and deliver him from hell. Therefore, he must speak to the confessor with great humility.

The Emperor Ferdinand, wishing to go to confession in his chamber, handed a chair to the confessor. When those who were in the room appeared surprised at so great an act of humility, the emperor said : “ Father, I am now a subject and you are my superior.”

Some persons argue with the confessor, and speak to him with as much haughtiness as if they were his superiors ; what fruit can they derive from such confessions ? You must, therefore, treat your confessor with respect. Speak to him always with humility ; and with humility obey all his commands. When he reproves you, be silent and receive his admonitions with humility ; accept with humility the remedy which he prescribes for your amendment, and do

not get angry at him, nor think him unjust and uncharitable. What would you say if you saw a sick man, who blamed the surgeon for opening an imposthume, and who treated him as a cruel, uncharitable man? Would you not say that the sick man was mad? "But he tortures me." Yes; but it is by this very torture that you are cured; without it you would die.

If the confessor tells you that he cannot absolve you until you have restored certain ill-gotten goods, obey him and do not importune or urge him to give absolution. Do you not know that when a sinner has once received absolution he seldom or never thinks of making restitution?

Does the confessor order you to return for absolution in a week or fortnight, and, in the mean time, to remove the occasion of sin, to pray to God for strength to resist all temptations, and to practise all the other means which he recommends to you? Obey, and you shall thus free yourself from sin. Do you not see that, heretofore, whenever you were absolved immediately, you always fell again into the same crimes?

"But, if in the mean time, death should overtake me?" Well, God has spared you thus far, even when you continued in sin, and never thought of returning to him; will he, now, that you desire to amend your life, send you a sudden death?

"But, perhaps, death will overtake me before I receive absolution." Well, if this should happen, make frequent acts of contrition. I have already said that he who has the intention of going to confession, and makes an act of perfect contrition, instantly receives pardon from God.

Of what use is it to receive absolution as often as you go to confession, when you do not renounce sin? All these

absolutions shall only add fuel to the fire which will torment you in hell. Listen to this fact. A certain gentleman contracted a sinful habit ; he found a confessor who always absolved him,—though he always relapsed. This sinner died, and was seen in hell carried on the shoulders of another person, who was also damned. Being asked who it was that carried him, he answered : “He is my confessor, who, by absolving me as often as I went to confession, has brought me to hell. I am damned, and he who brought me to hell is also damned.” Do not, then, be angry when the confessor, in order to find out whether you are really in earnest or not, defers absolution. If you always relapse into the same sin, after confession, the confessor cannot absolve you, unless you give some extraordinary and manifest sign of having the necessary dispositions. And if he does give you absolution, both you and he will be guilty of sacrilege ! Be obedient, then ; do what the priest bids you. When you return, after having done what he has prescribed, he will certainly absolve you, and thus you shall be delivered from the sin which you have been in the habit of committing.

Confession must not only be humble, it must also be *sincere* ; that is, says St. Alphonsus, “it must be without lies and excuses. Lies told in confession, when they are trivial, are not mortal sins ; but they are more grievous than other lies. But, when the matter is grievous, such lies are mortal sins. For example, it would be a mortal sin for a penitent to deny a mortal sin which he has committed, and has never confessed, or to deny that he has the habit of committing a certain grievous sin ; for, by such falsehoods, he would grievously deceive the priest of God.

Without lies, and *without excuses*. In the tribunal of

penance, the criminal must be his own accuser ; he must be the accuser, not the advocate or excuser, of his guilt. The more sincerely a man accuses himself, the more readily shall he obtain absolution and pardon from God. It is related that the Duke of Ostuni, being one day in a galley, went about among the slaves, asking for what crime they had been condemned. All answered that they were innocent ; only one acknowledged that he deserved severer punishment. The viceroy said : " Then it is not right to have you here among so many innocent persons ; " and thereupon he ordered this prisoner to be released. Now, how much more will God pardon him who confesses his sins without excuses in the tribunal of penance.

O how many there are who make their confessions badly ! Some tell their confessor the few good actions which they have performed, but do not speak of their sins. " Father," they say, " I hear Mass every day ; I say the beads ; I do not blaspheme ; I do not swear ; I do not take my neighbor's property." Well, what then ? Do you want to be praised by the confessor ? Confess your sins ; examine your conscience, and you will find a thousand things to be corrected : detraction, obscene expressions, lies, imprecations, unclean thoughts, hatred. Others, instead of accusing themselves, begin to defend their sins, and to dispute with the confessor. " Father," they say, " I blaspheme because I have a master that can not be borne ; I have borne hatred to a neighbor, because he has spoken ill of me ; I have fallen into sin because I am poor." What benefit do you expect from such confessions ? What is your object ? Is it that the confessor may approve of your sins ? Listen to what St. Gregory says : " If you excuse yourself, God will accuse you ; if you accuse yourself, God will excuse



you." Our Lord complained bitterly to St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, of those who excuse their sins in confession, and throw the blame of their sins upon others, saying: "Such a person has been the occasion of my sin; such another has tempted me." Thus, in confession they commit new sins; for, in order to excuse their own sins, they injure a neighbor's reputation without necessity. Such persons should be treated as a confessor once treated a certain woman who, in order to excuse her own sins, told all the bad actions of her husband. "For your own sins," said the confessor, "you will say the Hail, Holy Queen, once; and for the sins of your husband, you will fast every day for an entire month." "But must I do penance for the sins of my husband?" "Yes, if you confess all the sins of your husband." Henceforth confess, therefore, your own sins and not the sins of others, and say: "Father, it was not my companion, nor the occasion of sin, nor the devil, but my own malice, that made me voluntarily offend God." I know not how one can have sincere sorrow for a fault, when he imagines he had a good reason for committing it."

St. Francis de Sales warns penitents against making useless accusations in confession, or mentioning circumstances merely through habit. "I have not loved God with all my strength; I have not received the sacraments as I ought; I have had but little sorrow for my sins." All these are useless words; they are a loss of time. "I accuse myself on the seven deadly sins, on the five senses of the body, and on the ten commandments of God." Give up these useless accusations. It is better to tell the confessor some defect into which you have been for a long time accustomed to fall, without having made any serious efforts to amend. Confess, then, the faults which you wish to correct.

Of what use is it to say: "I accuse myself of all the lies I have told, of all my detractions, of all the imprecations I have uttered?" When you do not give up these vices, and when you say that you cannot avoid them, of what use is it to confess them? It is only making a mockery of Jesus Christ, and of the confessor. When, then, you accuse yourself of such faults, even though they should be only venial sins, confess them with a purpose of not relapsing into them.

Let every one, then, approach the Sacrament of Penance with an efficacious sorrow for sin, to which must be joined profound humility and an unshaken trust in God's mercy. Declare, with great simplicity, and without palliation or excuse, all your sins as well as your evil dispositions, especially such as generally give rise to your sins. By doing this frequently, especially when burdened with some notable transgression, not only shall you be wholly cleansed, but you shall, moreover, gain strength against similar falls in the future.

It is true that the confessing of our sins is a difficult task, but in fulfilling this task we must not consider the difficulty, but rather our salvation, and the invaluable peace that flows from confession. The confessional is not a tribunal established to brand the guilty one with disgrace, or to pronounce a sentence that may ruin his reputation or dishonor his memory, but a tribunal whose office it is to reestablish us in our forfeited birthright, and to bring back to our souls that heavenly peace and happiness which we lost by sin.

#### **6. What circumstances must be confessed?**

*Such circumstances as change the nature of our sins, or considerably aggravate their guilt.*

We are obliged to confess not only the number of our mortal sins, but also such circumstances as change the nature of the sin, or considerably aggravate its guilt. By circumstances we mean certain conditions which accompany an action and render it good or bad in a greater or less degree.

To judge correctly of the goodness or badness of an action, we must consider :

1. The person who performed the action ;
2. The action itself ;
3. The place where it was done ;
4. The instruments and accomplices, or the means employed to accomplish the action ;
5. The end or motive of the action ;
6. The manner in which it was done ;
7. The time in which it took place.

Now, some of these circumstances change the nature of the sin, whilst others only aggravate it. Those circumstances which superadd a new kind of sin, are called circumstances that change the nature of sin. It may happen that one and the same action is contrary to several commandments, or to several virtues, or to several obligations of the same virtue.

To illustrate : A certain man steals ten dollars from his neighbor, and also a chalice worth ten dollars out of a church. The first action is simply theft, and is contrary only to one virtue—justice ; the second action, on account of the circumstances, is, moreover, a sacrilege, and is opposed to two virtues—justice and religion.

The aggravating circumstances are those which only aggravate the malice of the action, without superadding any new sin. A person, for instance, steals twenty dollars. This theft is a mortal sin. At another time he steals one

hundred dollars. This circumstance greatly aggravates the sin of theft. Moreover, if he stole this sum from a man who sorely needs the money to support his family, it is clear that this circumstance considerably aggravates the sin of theft. Every one is indispensably obliged to tell the circumstances that change the species of the sin, otherwise he will not make a right confession. If he does not declare these circumstances, his confessor cannot judge properly of the nature and enormity of his sins, nor impose on him a suitable penance. Hence, he who designedly conceals any circumstance of this kind, not only renders his confession null and void, but is likewise guilty of sacrilege.

For the aforesaid reasons, the most eminent theologians declare that the confession of the notably aggravating circumstances is also necessary. We must certainly confess an aggravating circumstance which makes the sin a reserved case. We must also confess every aggravating circumstance when there is question of restitution, of satisfaction, or when a scandal is to be repaired, otherwise the confessor cannot give suitable directions to the penitent. Aggravating circumstances must necessarily be confessed when they make a sin mortal, which, without them, would be only venial.

There is, for instance, a person who steals only ten cents, but who had the firm intention to steal ten dollars if he could only have found them. This intention or desire he is bound to confess. To tell a lie in order to destroy the character of a person, or to tell a lie when questioned on oath by lawful authority, is a greater sin than to tell a trifling lie by which no one is injured. To slander a person of rank is a greater fault than to slander one of low



degree. To curse your father is far worse than to curse a stranger. To blaspheme God is worse than to blaspheme a saint. Such circumstances as these must be mentioned in confession. This is what we are taught by the Catechism of the Council of Trent. "With the bare enumeration of our mortal sins," says the Catechism, "we should not be satisfied; we should also mention such circumstances as considerably aggravate or extenuate their malice."

To sum up. That our confession may be entire, we must accuse ourselves of:

1. All the mortal sins that we can call to mind.
2. The number of times we have committed each of these sins, according to the best of our recollection. He who knows the exact number of times he has committed each sin must confess that number. He who is not certain of the exact number, should try to come as near the truth as possible; he should state, at least, the average number of times: that is, he should say how often in the day or the week, or the month he committed the sin.
3. That our confession may be entire, we must also mention such circumstances as change the nature of the sin. It is difficult to lay down a general rule for all cases in which the circumstances change the nature of sin. In practice, the best and safest rule to follow is to mention all those circumstances which, to the best of our knowledge, greatly increase our guilt. Just as it is not necessary to confess venial sins, so, in like manner, it is not necessary to mention such circumstances as only slightly aggravate the guilt. We need, therefore, mention only such circumstances as notably increase or lessen our guilt; or entirely change the nature of our sin.

**7. What should we avoid, in declaring these circumstances ?**

*We should avoid mentioning the name of any person who may be connected with our sins, and express ourselves as modestly as possible.*

The penitent should accuse himself of his own sins only; he should never injure the reputation of others by mentioning their sins. It would be not only imprudent but uncharitable to tell the sins of others when it can be avoided. This would be, according to St. Bernard, "lamenting the sins of others, and doing no penance for our own."

"However, it may happen," says St. Alphonsus, "that you may have sometimes to make the sin of another person known to your confessor, either in order to explain to him the species of a certain sin, or to make him understand the danger to which you are exposed, that he may be able to give you suitable advice. If, on such an occasion, you can find another confessor, to whom the person is unknown, it is better to go to him. If, however, you find it very inconvenient to change your confessor, or if you think that your ordinary confessor, knowing better the state of your conscience, can give you more useful counsel, you are not obliged to go to another confessor. Nevertheless, you should endeavor to shield the good name of the accomplices as well as you can. You must tell your confessor the state of life of the accomplices: that is, whether they are single or married, the degree of relationship, and whether bound by the vow of chastity or not, but you must not mention any names.

**8. If a person conceals a mortal sin, because he is afraid or ashamed, will his sins be forgiven?**

*None of his sins is forgiven, because he has made a sacrilegious confession.*

To conceal a mortal sin in confession is, as we have seen, a most grievous sin. First, then, you must know that, to conceal wilfully a sin which you know to be mortal, is a most grievous sin, because our Saviour, giving to the apostles and their successors the power to retain or remit sin, has also obliged the faithful to confess all the mortal sins which, after a sufficient examen, they can remember. To conceal a mortal sin in confession is, therefore, a formal disobedience to the law of Jesus Christ in a matter of the highest concern. It is, in itself, a most grievous sin, as it includes sacrilege, hypocrisy, ingratitude and lying to the Holy Ghost.

One who conceals a mortal sin in confession is, in the first place, guilty of sacrilege, and sacrilege of the worst kind; for he abuses a sacrament instituted by Christ to restore grace to the soul, and to reconcile us with Almighty God. Now, he who makes a false confession provokes God by the very means instituted to appease him. He insults God anew at the very time he goes to make peace with him, and he perverts the sentence of absolution into a sentence of condemnation. But, what is still worse, this sacrilege is the forerunner of another, of a much blacker dye—the sacrilege of unworthy communion, which generally follows a bad confession.

Secondly, he is guilty of hypocrisy in making a solemn act of religion serve as a cloak to sin; in masking his diabolical pride with counterfeit humility; in affecting to be most religiously devout when he is most sacrilegiously wicked; and, finally, in pretending repentance for his sins when he is actually increasing his guilt, and intending soon to add to it another most grievous sin. Thirdly, he is guilty of ingratitude, in despising the great-

est pledges of God's goodness towards him and frustrating, as far as in him lies, the designs of God's mercy — nay, using God's blessings as weapons to fight against him.

These, however, are but the inseparable circumstances of this sin; its proper malice consists in "telling a lie to the Holy Ghost." To understand this the better, it must be observed that, when a priest officiates in the sacred tribunal of penance, he acts as God's representative and as the public minister of Jesus Christ. Now, whatever affront is offered to a public minister, especially when he acts as such, reflects upon him whose minister he is. So that whatever is done to the minister of Christ, is done to Christ himself; and, consequently, to try to deceive the confessor is to try to deceive God himself, and to lie to the one is to lie to the other. Can you, then, think of such a sin without horror? Should you not detest such a crime with all your heart? If Christ should manifest himself visibly to you, would you have the boldness to try to deceive him? And is not the affront the same whether you try to deceive him or his minister? To lie to God's minister is to lie to God himself. On a certain occasion, God thought fit to manifest his hatred of this sin, by a punishment so severe and exemplary that it struck the whole Church with terror. I refer to the dreadful end of Ananias and Saphira. Having sold their estate, they pretended to bring the whole price of it to St. Peter; whereas, in reality, they kept back part of it for their own private use. But St. Peter, knowing by divine revelation their want of sincerity, was deeply grieved thereat, and being moved with just indignation, said to Ananias: "Why has Satan tempted thy heart to lie unto the Holy Ghost? for thou hast not lied unto man, but unto God." (Acts v., 4.)



Whereupon the unfortunate wretch fell dead at the feet of St. Peter; and a few moments after, his wife, who had been the accomplice of his crime, received the same just punishment of her hypocrisy. This is the account given us by St. Luke, of the exemplary judgment that befell this unhappy couple. Mark well, St. Peter styles their sin *a lying to the Holy Ghost*; for, though he knew they intended to deceive only himself, yet, inasmuch as he was Christ's minister, he considered the insult offered to God himself, and hence the punishment was so terrible.

However, these two persons, so severely punished, were guilty neither of sacrilege nor injustice; the sole charge against them was lying and hypocrisy. Whereas, in the case of a false confession, besides hypocrisy and lying to the Holy Ghost, there is, over and above, a sacrament profaned, God's blessings abused, his mercies trampled upon, and the most effectual means of amendment turned into an occasion of greater sin. It is evident, then, that the crime of the mock penitent is far more grievous, and, consequently, more detestable in the sight of God, than the sin of Ananias and Saphira.

Will God, then, let the wicked sinner, who is guilty of false confessions, go unpunished? By no means; though the criminal may not be punished immediately in this life, yet his soul falls under the malediction of God, in the very instant he commits the sacrilege. Whilst the confessor, acting according to the best of his knowledge, pronounces the words of absolution over the hypocrite, Almighty God, who cannot be deceived, looks down upon the sinner with just indignation, and instead of cancelling the handwriting that is against the wretched man, condemns his soul to an increase of torments proportioned to the increase of his guilt.

**9. If a person has wilfully concealed a mortal sin, in one or more confessions, how can he obtain forgiveness?**

*He must: 1, confess the sin and tell the priest in how many confessions he concealed it; 2, he must again accuse himself of all the sins mentioned in his bad confessions.*

As a rule, the sincere penitent should not trouble himself about his past confessions. When he has once received absolution, he should take it for granted that the confession has been properly made, unless he has a good reason to believe either that he had no true contrition, or that he wilfully concealed a mortal sin or some circumstance which ought to be confessed.

The following persons, however, make bad confessions:

1. Those who, even after confession, still bear a hatred to their neighbor.

2. Those who did not make restitution when it was in their power, and who go to confession without the sincere determination to make restitution, always promising, but never honestly intending to keep their promise.

3. Those who have been grossly neglectful in fulfilling the duties of their state of life. Of this sin of gross negligence are guilty all those parents who allow their children and those under their charge to go to immoral theatres and forbidden dances, to keep company alone with persons of the other sex; who permit their children to receive visits at unseasonable hours; who allow company-keeping or courting, when they know that their son or daughter has neither the intention nor the hope of marrying within a reasonable time; who allow their daughters to keep company with those they cannot marry, such as men who are married or divorced, Protestants, Jews, infidels and near relations; also young women who keep and encourage

such company with or without the consent of their parents. The Church forbids marriage with such persons, and consequently forbids also courting or company-keeping with them.

4. Those who take no pains to correct their sinful habits of intemperance, cursing and the like.

5. Those who go to confession without intending to give up the proximate occasion of sin, not wishing to break off their sinful habits.

6. Those who go to an easy confessor who always absolves them, who never asks them any questions, nor gives them any warning or advice.

7. Those who go to confession and receive absolution, but are grossly ignorant of those things that every Christian, by the command of God and the Church, is bound to know, at least in substance—to wit: the Apostles' Creed, the Commandments of God; the Precepts of the Church; the Sacraments, at least those which they receive, and the Lord's Prayer. Those also are guilty who, in spite of the admonitions of their confessor and the voice of their conscience, take no pains to be properly instructed in their Christian duties.

8. Those who knowingly and wilfully conceal a mortal sin in confession.

9. Those who know for certain that the sin which they have committed is most grievous, and yet accuse themselves of it as if they were in doubt. "I doubt," says one, "whether I gave full consent to that temptation against the holy virtue of purity," although he knows for certain that he deliberately consented to it. "I doubt," says another, "whether the oath which I took some time ago was false," although he is fully convinced that what he confirmed on

oath was false. "Father," says another, "I was a little hearty," when, in reality, he was intoxicated. "Father," says another, "I was a little indelicate," when, in reality, she committed some shameful sin.

10. Those who have been refused absolution by one confessor and who go to another, but do not tell the sins for which they were put off.

11. Those who go to confession merely out of routine. They belong, for instance, to a society, or it is Easter-time, and they go to confession, not with the intention of doing better, but merely for shame's sake, because the others go.

12. Those who confess a mortal sin so as to make the confessor believe they have committed but a venial sin. There is a penitent. He bears a great hatred to his neighbor. He comes to confession and says that he entertained a slight grudge against his neighbor, or that he cannot love him as much as he ought. There is another. He has stolen a considerable sum of money. Now he goes to confession and says that he stole a few trifles.

13. Those who know, for certain, that the number of their mortal sins is greater than they have mentioned. One, for instance, who has missed Mass, through his own fault, six times, and says that he missed Mass only twice.

14. Those who accuse themselves of having had wicked thoughts and desires when they have in reality committed sinful actions.

15. Those who knowingly and wilfully conceal an important circumstance which changes the nature of the sin. For instance, a person has stolen a chalice or some other consecrated object, and he accuses himself simply of the sin of theft, without mentioning the fact that what he stole



was consecrated. There is another. He has had the misfortune to commit a sin against the sixth commandment; it was perhaps, with a married person, or with one related to him by blood or marriage, or some sin against nature. Now, when he goes to confession he accuses himself of having committed a sin against the sixth commandment, but deliberately omits this important circumstance.

16. Those who knowingly and wilfully conceal a mortal sin in confession, and afterwards when they confess that sin, deliberately conceal the fact that they made a bad confession, and perhaps also an unworthy communion, or perhaps received some other sacrament unworthily, such as confirmation or marriage. Those who wilfully conceal a mortal sin in confession, and afterwards accuse themselves of it as of a sin which they had merely forgotten in confession.

17. Those who wilfully conceal a sin which is only venial in itself, but which, from an erroneous conscience, they consider to be grievous. Some children, for instance, foolishly imagine that a small theft is a mortal sin. Now, if through shame or fear they conceal this sin in confession, they make a bad confession.

18. Those who do not confess a mortal sin because they hate to think it is a mortal sin, and are unwilling to ask for information. A person, for instance, carries on an unjust speculation and grievously defrauds his neighbor in buying or selling, but neglects to mention this fact in confession.

19. Those who are not upright in answering questions of importance which the priest asks them in confession. There is a relapsing sinner. He sincerely accuses himself of the number of sins which he has committed against the sixth commandment. Now when the priest asks him how

long it was since he committed that sin last, he answers, "A month ago," although he knows, for certain, that he committed that sin on the very day of his confession or the day previous. He tells this falsehood because he fears that, were he to tell the truth, he would not receive absolution, but would be put off for a week or two.

There is another. He has been living, for some time, in the proximate occasion of sin. He goes to confession and accuses himself of all the sins he committed while in that occasion. The confessor tells him to give up the occasion of sin, or, if, for very weighty reasons, that cannot be done immediately, at least to use the means which he prescribes in order to keep from falling into sin again. Now this penitent returns to confession; he is asked whether he did as he was told. Being afraid that he will again be refused absolution, he answers that he did, though he knows that he neither avoided the proximate occasion of sin nor made use of the necessary means. Such persons may tell all their sins, yet they make bad confessions because, by their deceitful answers, they induce the priest to give them absolution when they are unworthy.

20. Those parents who force their children, against their will, to enter upon a state of life to which they are not called by Almighty God—such, for instance, as the marriage state; or who oblige their daughter to marry a man whom she cannot love, merely because he is wealthy, thereby destroying the daughter's happiness in this life and perhaps also in the next; and yet who never accuse themselves of this great sin.

21. Those parents who hinder their children from entering upon a state of life to which God clearly calls them, and who never mention this great sin in confession.

22. Also those parents who suffer their children to read sentimental weekly papers and magazines, and take books indiscriminately from public libraries and certain circulating libraries.

A few years ago, a good priest was one day going along the street. He saw a little girl, a Catholic, about ten years old, poring intently over a book. The priest snatched the book from her hands. What was it? A work on physiology with plates! Where did the child get the book? Her sister got it in the public library!

And afterwards parents come and complain to the priest: "I can't do anything with my boy. My daughter has run away from me, and I fear has gone to the bad."

O parents! Your eyes will be opened on the judgment-day!

23. Those who go to a confessor who is somewhat deaf, and who tell a certain grievous sin in so low a voice that the confessor cannot understand them.

24. Those who confess to a priest who is not well acquainted with their language, and who use terms so obscure that he does not understand them.

In all the above cases, the confession must be made over again, and the penitent must go back to the time when he made the last good confession and received absolution.

**10. Is a mortal sin, which we merely forgot in confession, forgiven along with the others?**

*Yes; because God knows that we wished to confess it, and are sorry for it.*

We said above that we are obliged to confess *all* our mortal sins; but we added: "which we remember." "But," says one, "I can never remember all my sins. It is for this

reason that confession appears to me so difficult and burdensome." Well ? what if you cannot remember all your sins ? Confess at least those which, after a careful examination of conscience, you do remember. Who can remember exactly all his sins ? No one. God alone knows all our sins, and he pardons all when he sees in our soul a true, sincere sorrow. Peace to men of good will ! "Remember," says St. Alphonsus, "that a mortal sin forgotten in confession is just as truly forgiven, though indirectly, as those which you have confessed, provided you were really sorry for all your offences against God." The principal thing in confession is, not so much the remembrance of your sins, as the true, sincere sorrow for them. Endeavor to acquire this true sorrow, and then you may be without scruple.

#### **11. If we remember the sin afterwards, what must we do ?**

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*We must mention it in our next confession, because we are bound to confess all the mortal sins which we remember.*

If, after having received absolution and left the confessional, you remember a mortal sin which you forgot to confess, you need not return to confession, especially if you cannot do so conveniently ; above all, you should not, on that account, stay away from holy communion. "It will suffice," says St. Alphonsus, "to confess that sin in your next confession," saying, "Father, at my last confession, I forgot to accuse myself of this sin (here name the sin).

I will here add some very useful remarks, taken from the *Spouse of Christ*, by St. Alphonsus. Those who fear that they have committed certain sins, or have made bad confessions, will do well to disclose them to a confessor, for their greater peace of mind, unless indeed they have a scruple.



pulous conscience. For the scrupulous it is not advisable to confess their doubts. It may be useful for the timid to know certain doctrines approved by theologians, which may save them from a great deal of disquiet of conscience, and give them peace of mind. First, it is a solid and very probable opinion of divines that there is no obligation of confessing doubtful mortal sins, when a person doubts whether he had full advertence, or whether he gave a perfect and deliberate consent. Divines add, that at death such a one is obliged to make an act of perfect contrition, lest the doubtful sin should have been really grievous, or at least to tell some certain sin, (a venial sin is sufficient,) and then to receive the Sacrament of Penance. But this is necessary only when a person, after the doubtful sin, has never received sacramental absolution. Many theologians, of high authority, also say that persons who have, for a long time, led a spiritual life, when doubtful whether they have consented to mortal sin, may remain certain of not having lost the grace of God; because it is morally impossible that a soul, well-confirmed in good purposes, should be suddenly changed and yield to mortal sin, without clearly perceiving that she has consented to it. For, mortal sin is a monster so horrible that it cannot enter a soul that has for a long time abhorred it, without producing on the mind a clear knowledge of the fact. [This is fully proved in St. Alphonsus' work on *Moral Theology*.—Lib. 6, n. 450 et 476, vers. item.]

Secondly, when it is certain that a mortal sin has been committed, and when there is a doubt whether it has been ever confessed, then if the doubt be a negative one, that is, if there be no reason to judge that it has been confessed, it is certainly necessary to tell the sin in confession. But,

when there is reason to believe, or a well-founded presumption, that the sin has been once told, then, according to the common opinion of divines, there is no obligation of confessing it. Hence, divines commonly teach, that, if a person, who has made his general or particular confessions with sufficient diligence, doubts whether he has forgotten in confession a certain sin (or circumstance of sin), he is not bound to confess it; because he can prudently judge that it has been already sufficiently confessed. (*Theolo. Mor.* lib. 6, n. 477.) He needs not confess the sin, though he should feel a great unwillingness to disclose the doubt which torments him. But such a person may say: "If I were bound to tell such a thing I should feel great shame." But what does it matter that you are ashamed to tell it? As long as you are not obliged to confess it, be not troubled. The confession of certain natural actions would also cause shame, but you are not therefore obliged to mention them. Thus, for example, you are not obliged to confess certain acts of levity or immodest jests which occurred in your childhood, without a knowledge of their malice. Nor is your having done these acts in secret a certain proof of malice; for children do certain natural actions secretly, though these actions are not sins. Hence, we are not bound to accuse ourselves in particular of such things, unless we remember that we committed them with the impression, or at least with the doubt, that they were grievous sins. It is, then, enough for a person to say to himself: "Lord, if I really knew that I was bound to confess these things, I would readily confess them, though I should suffer every pain."

This is intended for the comfort of timorous souls who feel great anxiety, arising from a fear that they did not well

know how to explain all their doubts in confession. But it is useful for all, at least for their humiliation, to make known to their director the doubts by which they are troubled.

I except the scrupulous, for they should not speak of their doubts. What I would advise is, that all would explain to their confessors their passions, attachments, and the causes of their temptations, that he may be able to cut off the roots ; for if they are not extirpated, as far as possible, they will never cease to cause temptations, and will expose the soul to great danger of consenting to sin. It will also be very profitable to some to disclose the temptations which are most humiliating, particularly thoughts against chastity, though there should be no consent. St. Philip Neri used to say that a temptation disclosed is half conquered.

I have said that it is very profitable to some : for with regard to others of tried virtue, who are too timid on this point, and are always afraid of having consented to sin, it is sometimes useful to forbid them to confess such temptations, unless they are certain of having yielded to them. For, by the very examination which such persons make, in order to ascertain whether they have consented or not, and by thinking how they shall explain the temptation, the images of the bad objects only become more vivid, and the soul becomes more agitated by repeated apprehensions of consent. Obey your confessor on this point, and be regulated by his advice. What I recommend to you is to be sincere and faithful in disclosing to your spiritual father all the secrets of your conscience, and in explaining all things to him as they really are.

**12. When is it advisable to accuse ourselves of a sin of our past life, which we have already confessed ?**

1, *When we have not committed a wilful fault since our last confession, and wish to receive the Sacrament of Penance* ; 2, *when we have but venial sins to confess, and doubt whether we are really sorry for any of them.*

We read in the lives of many saints that they were in the habit of going to confession every day. Now it is most probable that they had not, each time, to accuse themselves of deliberate faults. But, knowing from experience the great spiritual strength which is derived from frequent confession, they accused themselves of a sin of their past life which they had already confessed, in order to be able to receive the Sacrament of Penance. As the priest cannot administer the sacrament of baptism without water, so he cannot administer the Sacrament of Penance without the matter of this sacrament, which consists in the acts of the penitent—confession of sin, sorrow and satisfaction for the same. He, therefore, who has not committed a wilful fault since his last confession, and who wishes to receive the Sacrament of Penance, must accuse himself of some sin of his past life for which he has sincere sorrow. If he never committed a mortal sin in his life, it will suffice if he accuses himself of some venial sin for which he is truly sorry. He may say, for instance: “I accuse myself of all the sins of my past life, especially of those which I have committed against charity, or purity, etc.”

Again, it is advisable to mention in confession a sin of our past life, if we have but venial sins to confess and doubt whether we are sufficiently sorry for them. The reason of this is, because contrition is an essential condition for the valid reception of the Sacrament of Penance. Hence, to make quite sure that there is one sin in our confession for which we are truly sorry, we should accuse ourselves of some grievous sin of our past life.



**13. What is a general confession ?**

*A general confession is one in which we repeat all or some of our former confessions.*

There are two kinds of confession, viz. : *particular* confession, that is the confession of the sins committed since the last confession ; and *general* confession, that is a review of the confessions of one's past life. In the general confession, the penitent accuses himself sincerely, and with a contrite heart, of all the sins which he has committed from his youth, or since his first mortal sin, or since his first bad confession.

**14. Who should make a general confession ?**

1, *Those who, in their former confessions, have concealed a grievous sin* : 2, *those who had no true sorrow and firm purpose of amendment* ; 3, *those who were guilty of very culpable negligence in the examination of conscience.*

For many persons, a general confession is necessary ; for others it is hurtful, and for others again it is very useful. All those persons of whom we said in Q. 9. that they make bad confessions, are under the necessity of making a general confession. In order to obtain forgiveness, these persons must : 1, Confess over again all those mortal sins which they have committed from the time they began to make bad confessions ; 2, They must tell in confession how many times they received the various sacraments unworthily—to wit : Penance, Communion, Confirmation, marriage, etc., and 3, They must be very sorry for all those sins, and firmly resolve never to commit them again.

One day, the Countess de Joigny sent for St. Vincent de Paul to prepare one of her servants for death. The saint went immediately. He induced the sick man to make a

general confession. And, indeed, nothing but a general confession could have saved the dying man ; for he publicly declared that he had never confessed certain mortal sins. The sincerity with which he declared his secret sins was followed by an inexpressible consolation. The sinner felt that an enormous weight, which had for many years oppressed him, was at length taken off. The most remarkable circumstance was, that he passed from one extreme to the other. During the three days of life that were still left him, he made several public confessions of the sins which a false shame had hitherto prevented him from confessing. “ Ah ! madam,” he exclaimed, on beholding the countess enter his room, “ I should have been damned, on account of several mortal sins which I always concealed in confession ; but Father Vincent has, by his charity, induced me to make all my confessions over again. I am very grateful to Father Vincent, and to you for having sent him to prepare me for a happy death.” Upon hearing this unexpected confession of her servant, the countess exclaimed : “ Alas ! Father Vincent, what do I hear ? How great is my surprise ? What happened to this servant of mine happens, no doubt, to many other persons. If this man, who was considered a pious Christian by every one who knew him, could live so long in the state of mortal sin, how great must be the spiritual misery of those whose life is much more careless ! Alas ! my dear father, how many souls are lost ! What is to be done ? What remedy must be applied to prevent the ruin of so many souls ? ”

“ Ah ! ” exclaimed St. Vincent, “ false shame prevents a great many persons from confessing all their grievous sins. This is the reason why they live constantly in a state of damnation. O my God ! how important it is to

inculcate often the necessity of a general confession. Persons who have concealed grievous sins in their confession have no other remedy to recover the grace of God. This farmer avowed publicly, that he would have been damned had it not been for his general confession. A soul, penetrated with the spirit of true repentance, is filled with so great a hatred for sin that she is ready to confess her sins, not only to the priest, but to every one else whom she meets. I have met with persons, who, after a good general confession, wished to make known their sins to the whole world; and I had the greatest difficulty to prevent them from doing so. Although I had strictly forbidden them to speak to any one of their crimes, yet some would tell me: 'No, father, I will not be silent; I will tell the people how great a sinner I am; I am the most wicked man in the world; I deserve death.' See, then, what the grace of God can do; see the great sorrow it can produce in the soul! This was the way in which the greatest saints acted. Witness St. Augustine, who made a public confession of his sins in a book which he wrote to that effect; witness also the great Apostle St. Paul, who tells us, in his Epistles, what sins he committed against God and the Church. These saints made this public confession of their sins, in order to make known to the whole world the great mercy which God had exercised in their regard. The grace of God has also produced a similar effect in the soul of this farmer. O my God! how important is it to inculcate the necessity of general confession." (Abelly, *Vie de St. Vincent de Paul.*)

There are, however, others to whom a general confession would be hurtful. They are:

1. Those who, whilst examining their conscience, while

thinking of the shameful sins of their past life, are in danger of consenting to bad thoughts.

2. *Scrupulous persons.* There are certain scrupulous souls who have already made a general confession, who have confessed even more than was necessary, and yet they cannot rest. They wish to make their general confession over and over again, in the vain hope of thus removing their fears and troubles. But what is the result? Their perplexities are only increased, because new apprehensions and scruples of having omitted, or of not having sufficiently explained some sin, arise continually in their mind. Hence, the more they repeat their confessions, the more they are stung with scruples and wounded with fear and anxiety. The reason of this is that the terrors which agitate these scrupulous souls are grounded, not on solid reasons, but on baseless apprehensions, which are only quickened and magnified by the remembrance of past sins.

“But,” says one, “if the sin be really mortal, and if I have not confessed it, shall I be saved?” “Yes, you will be saved,” says St. Alphonsus, in common with St. Thomas Aquinas and all divines; “for, if, after a careful examination of conscience, you still forget a mortal sin, that sin is indirectly forgiven by sacramental absolution; because when God forgives one mortal sin, he forgives all.”

He who makes as good a confession as he can, obtains, by the Sacrament of Penance, the forgiveness, not only of those sins which he confesses, but also of those which he forgets to confess. In spite of his weak memory, he is in God's grace and in the path of salvation. He should therefore be at peace and never more mention his past sins. He should understand that a general confession is useful for a certain class of persons, but very dangerous



and injurious to one that is always agitated by scruples ; the repetition of past sins may be very hurtful to such a soul, and may drive her to despair. Hence, good confessors do not permit scrupulous persons to speak of past sins. The remedy for such persons is, not to explain their doubts, but to be silent and obey ; believing, for certain, that God will never ask of them an account of what they have done in obedience to their confessor. They must not proudly prefer their own fancies to the decisions of their spiritual director. Not to be satisfied with such a decision is *not piety*, but *obstinacy* and *pride* ; it is obeying, not God, but the inspirations of the devil. Scrupulous souls can have nothing to fear in obeying their confessor ; they must obey him as Christ himself, whose place he holds. “He who heareth you,” says Christ, speaking of the priest, “heareth me.”

Finally, there are persons for whom a general confession is most useful. They are those who have never made a general confession. A general confession gives the confessor a better knowledge of the state of our conscience, and of the passions and vices to which we are most inclined. He is thereby enabled to apply the proper remedies to our soul and to give us suitable advice.

A general confession also helps to humble us : it increases our sorrow for our sins, and makes us resolve earnestly to do better in future.

Whilst the prodigal son was feeding the swine, he could not help reflecting on the happiness of his brother who had remained faithful, and even of the servants in his father's house. He compared his life of degradation with the life he might have enjoyed had he stayed with his father. The grief which he had caused his father, his ingratitude towards him, his own bodily and spiritual

misery—all the crimes of his life rose up before his mind. He could no longer endure his shameful degradation nor the bitter remorse of his conscience. He hastened, with tears in his eyes, to make a public confession to his father, of all his crimes. "Father," said he, "make me as one of thy hired servants."

We, too, on looking back at all the faults into which we have fallen during our whole life, feel more contrition than we generally feel when we think of those ordinary failings which usually form the matter of our confessions. Far different, indeed, is the confusion which fills the mind at the sight of a whole legion of sins, from that which is occasioned by the consciousness of some single fault into which we have but recently fallen. One or two regiments cannot have that power against the enemy which is possessed by the vast, serried mass of an entire army. So the one or two faults, of which we accuse ourselves in our ordinary confessions, cannot have the force which the vast army of our sins possesses, to subdue our hearts, to soften them into perfect contrition, and to bring us to a deep sense of humility and self-abasement.

A person who was desirous of leading a regular life, made a retreat of some days, during which he wrote out his general confession. While he was meditating on hell, and was penetrated with the salutary thought of the eternal torments of the damned, he cast his eyes on the paper which contained his confession. At the sight of the sins of his entire life, his fears redoubled, and, taking the paper, he said, "Oh! what fuel for the fire of hell!" Such was the impression produced by this reflection, that he resolved to renounce forever the follies of the world, and to devote himself thenceforward to a life of retirement and regularity.

The holy Bishop Eligius, desirous of attaining to a more exact purity of conscience, made a general confession to a priest, of all the sins he had committed from his earliest childhood, after which he began to advance with greater earnestness and fervor in the way of perfection. (Surius, *in Vita S. Eligii.*)

It is related in the life of St. Engelbert that, having retired to his private oratory, in company with another bishop, he accused himself of all his sins with such a profusion of tears that they flowed down copiously over his breast, so that his confessor was no less edified than astonished at the heartiness and intensity of his repentance. The next morning, he resumed the confession of certain other failings, with a like abundance of tears. (Surius, *in vita S. Engelberti.*)

It is plain that this lively repentance, this deep, inward and real humility, must help greatly to purify the soul. St. Paul teaches, that supernatural sorrow works lasting fruits of salvation. (2 Cor. vii., 10.) The apostle means to say that penance, when duly performed, produces a lasting amendment. Various reasons can be given for this. In the first place the very confession of our faults and the firm purpose of amendment, which accompany a well-made general confession, detach the soul from all affection for its past sins, and render it careful not to fall into them again. Moreover, the special grace bestowed in the Sacrament of Penance, strengthens the will in its struggle against our disordered inclinations, and against the deceitful suggestions of the devil; so that a general confession not only cleanses us from our past sins, but makes us more careful not to commit them again.

St. Bernard, in his history of St. Malachy relates, that

there was a woman so subject to fits of rage that she seemed like a fury from the bottomless pit sent to torment every one who came in contact with her. Wherever she went, her venomous tongue stirred up hatred and quarrelling, so that she became unbearable, not only to her neighbors, but even to her own children, who, unable to live with her, had resolved to leave her. Before doing so, however, they took her to the holy Bishop Malachy to see whether he could cure her ungovernable temper. St. Malachy merely asked her whether she had ever confessed all her outbursts of passion, all her outrageous words, and the numberless brawls she had provoked with her unruly tongue. She replied that she had not. "Well, then," continued the holy bishop, "confess them now to me." She did so, and after her confession, he gave her some wholesome advice and pointed out suitable remedies, and, having imposed a penance, absolved her from her sins. After this confession the woman, to the astonishment of all who knew her, appeared changed from the fierce lioness she had been, into a meek lamb. St. Bernard concludes his narration by saying that "the woman was still living when he wrote, and that she, whose tongue had, up to that time, outraged and exasperated every one, now seemed to be unable to resent the insults and mishaps which daily fell to her lot." Behold, then, how a good general confession has power to cleanse the soul from past defilement, and to preserve it from falling again into grievous sin. By such a confession the cause of sin is greatly diminished; temptation is lessened or ceases altogether; grace is considerably increased; the mind is unusually strengthened; and the demon is enervated and confounded. Oh! what consolation results from this practice: what peace of mind,



what reformation of life, what confidence in God, what lightness of heart, what a facility in the performance of good works, what an increase of devotion, what tenderness of heart, what clearness of intellect, what purity of conscience, what an increase of all spiritual gifts which conduce to our eternal salvation !

Christ himself has been pleased to give us a striking illustration of this doctrine in the case of the well-known penitent, Blessed Margaret of Cortona. Beholding the fervent conversion of this sinful woman, our Lord began to instruct and encourage her in divers ways, showing himself to her overflowing with love and tender compassion, and often addressing her as his "*poor little one !*" One day the holy penitent, in a transport of that confidence which is the natural fruit of filial love, said to him, "O my Lord ! Thou always callest me thy '*poor little one.*' Am I never to have the happiness of hearing thy divine lips call me by the sweet name of '*daughter*' ?" "Thou art not yet worthy of it," replied our dear Lord. "Before thou canst receive the treatment and the name of daughter, thou must more thoroughly cleanse thy soul by a general confession." On hearing this, Margaret carefully examined her conscience, and, during eight successive days, confessed her sins to a priest, shedding, at the same time, a torrent of tears. After her confession, she went with great humility to receive the most holy body of our Lord. Scarcely had she received communion when she heard distinctly in her inmost soul, the words, "*my daughter.*" On hearing this most sweet name, she was rapt into an ecstasy, and remained immersed, as it were, in an ocean of gladness and delight. On recovering from her trance she began to exclaim, as one beside herself, "O sweet word,—'*My*

daughter' ! O loving name ! O word full of joy ! O sound replete with assurance, ' My daughter ' ! " (Francesco Marchese, *Vita di S. Margaretha da Cortona*, c. vii.) From this we may see how much a general confession, and the preparation it implies, avail to purify and beautify the soul ; since, after her general confession, this holy woman rose from the pitiable condition of a servant, to the honorable rank of a well-beloved daughter. She who, at first, was looked upon by the Redeemer with pity, was afterwards contemplated by him with love and tender complacency.

The great advantage of a general confession, however, is best seen at the hour of death. Who would not wish, when about to appear before the tribunal of God—at that dreadful moment which is to decide his fate for all eternity—who would not wish, then, to have made a good general confession of his whole life ? What consolation for the dying Christian, if, before his last illness, he has already put in order the affairs of his soul ? How can any one approach that last moment unprepared ? How terrible for the dying sinner to open his eyes upon his whole past life only when he is about to close them forever ! Our Saviour says : "*Watch ye and be ready, for the Lord of that servant shall come in a day that he hopeth not, and in an hour that he knoweth not.*" (St. Matt. xxiv., St. Luke, xii.)

A man of high rank came one day to a missionary, and begged him to hear his general confession. The priest asked him why he was so anxious to make it. " Ah, reverend sir," answered the gentleman, " am I not to die ? After such a sinful life, I cannot die in peace unless I make a general confession ; and, if I do not make it now, I foresee that, at the hour of death, I shall not be able to do it as I ought. My wife, my children, the terrors of

that last moment, my sufferings, will all deprive me of the necessary recollection of mind, and I shall not have that tranquillity so necessary for such an important duty. It would, then, be a great folly for me to put off this confession until the last moment of my life." This pious gentleman had considered well the words of our Saviour, in the Gospel: "*Blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.*" (St. Luke, xii., 37.)

If, then, dear Christian, you see that it would be useful for you to make a general confession, do not delay it too long, but set about it with promptitude and courage. But, if this general confession is not only useful, but even necessary, allow yourself no rest until you have made it. When you lie down on your bed to-night, remember that this night may be your last, and say to yourself: "What should I wish to have done if I were lying on my death-bed?" Be not deceived by the devil, who will strive to persuade you that you have not time, or that it is too difficult. He will bring up before you various obstacles, and a thousand occupations; to-day this, to-morrow that; and this he will continue to do until you have neither time nor opportunity, nor the grace left, to do what is so needful for your eternal salvation. Be on your guard against the deceptions of this lying spirit.

A Dominican novice, having one night fallen asleep near the altar, heard a voice calling to him: "Go and have thy tonsure renewed." On awaking, the youth understood how God, by that voice, exhorted to him confess his sins again. He went directly and cast himself at the feet of St. Dominic, and repeated his last confession with greater care and accuracy. Shortly after he retired to rest. In the midst of his slumbers, he beheld an angel coming down from heaven,

bearing in his hands a golden crown set with priceless gems ; and the angel, winging his flight towards him, placed this crown upon his brow. Let him who never made a general confession consider the above warning as made to himself. Let him, at the approach of some great festival, for instance, say to himself, "Renew thy tonsure" ; prepare for a general confession, which will cleanse thy soul, and render it wholly fair and pure in the sight of the Lord. He may, then, confidently hope to see the day, not indeed in this life, but in the next, when his brow will be adorned with a crown of resplendent glory.

**15. When is a general confession very useful ?**

1, *Before first communion* ; 2, *before entering another state of life* ; 3, *in dangerous illness* ; 4, *at the time of a jubilee, a mission, etc.*

Although a general confession is useful at any period of our life, yet there are certain important moments when a general confession is to be especially recommended. Such moments are : 1, the time of first communion ; 2, the time when we are about to enter another state of life, such as matrimony or the religious or clerical state ; 3, the time of a dangerous illness, of an epidemic, or the eve of a dangerous voyage, or in old age. A general confession made before the first communion, makes the heart of the recipient a more worthy and agreeable dwelling for our Lord. If made before entering another state of life, the general confession obtains for us more abundant graces to live up to the duties of our new state. During a dangerous illness or epidemic, a general confession prepares us for a happy death, and greatly diminishes the fear of death. A general confession made during a jubilee or mission, or



any other time of special devotion, enables us to share more abundantly in the spiritual blessings vouchsafed during such times. However, it is not for the penitent, but for the confessor, to decide when a general confession is useful and advisable. Now, how is a general confession to be made? The devil will try to persuade you that a general confession is well-nigh impossible. He will perhaps tempt you to say: "How can I make a good examen of conscience? How can I call to mind all the sins of ten, or twenty or thirty years?"

A general confession, however, is not so difficult as some imagine. Remember: 1, In a general confession, it is not necessary to examine your conscience particularly about *venial sins*. It will do to accuse yourself of them in general. You need only examine your conscience about your *mortal sins*.

2. Your mortal sins have either been *habitual* or *not*. If habitual, you cannot indeed know the exact number of times; but you can say, about how long you have been in the habit of committing certain mortal sins of thought, word, action and omission—about how often you committed them in the day, or week, or month, or year,—and whether the habit was interrupted by periods of amendment or not, and about how long those periods were.

3. If, instead of being habitual, the sins were but seldom committed; then it is not so very difficult to make out the number of times. St. Thomas says: "In confession, no more is required of us than we are (morally) able to do."

4. You will receive great assistance from your confessor; and much more from God, to whom you must pray frequently and fervently; you must especially have recourse to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the refuge of sinners.

5. You will be greatly assisted in examining your conscience by using the form of examination found in the Mission-book of the Redemptorist Fathers, or in some other good Prayer-book.

### 16. How do you make your confession ?

1. *When I see the priest ready to hear me, I say : "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned ;"* 2, *after this, I say : "I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, to blessed Michael the Archangel, to blessed John the Baptist, to the holy apostles, Peter and Paul, and to all the saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed—through my fault—through my fault—through my most grievous fault ;"* 3, *then I tell the priest when I made my last confession, and the sins I have committed ;* 4, *after I have confessed my sins I say : "For these and all my other sins, which I cannot at present remember, I am heartily sorry, purpose amendment and humbly beg pardon and absolution of you my ghostly father."*

On entering the confessional we should be penetrated with this truth: that it is to Almighty God that we are going to confess. By the words, "I confess to Almighty God," we clearly call upon him to listen to our confession. In the confessional, we should place ourselves in spirit at the feet of our Lord, make the sign of the cross, and beg the priest's blessing, saying: "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned."—It is customary to call the priest, "Father!" It is not in presence of a judge that we kneel; it is before a father.—And what do you seek, my son? "*Bless me!*"—I bless you; but on what grounds do you ask my blessing?—"*Because I have sinned!*" Then the priest answers: "May the Lord be in thy heart and on thy lips, that thou

mayest truly and humbly confess thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

When the priest has given us his blessing we say the *Confiteor* as far as "*through my most grievous fault.*" At these words we should bow our head and penitently strike our breast. Then we tell the priest how long it is since our last confession; whether we were absolved then or not, whether we received holy communion, and performed our penance. Then we should accuse ourselves of our sins. We would remark, here, once more, that he who has but venial sins to confess would do well to include in his confession some grievous sin of his past life.

He who intends to make a general confession, should first tell the priest why he desires to make it. The priest will then question him about his age, his trade or profession, his state of life, when he made his first communion, whether he concealed a mortal sin in any of his former confessions, how long ago, and how many times a year he went to confession and communion, whether he received confirmation, matrimony or extreme unction while in mortal sin—and so on. After the penitent has answered the questions of his confessor, with as much accuracy and sincerity as possible, he begins to confess his sins. First, he mentions those which he has committed since his last good confession, and then he makes his general confession.

Having finished our accusation, we should add: "For these and all the other sins, which I cannot now remember, I am heartily sorry; I purpose amendment for the future; I most humbly ask pardon of God, and penance and absolution of you, my ghostly father. Therefore I beseech the Blessed Mary, ever Virgin, etc." We should then

listen attentively to the instructions of the priest. We should consider any other thought, at this time, as an illusion of the devil who wishes to rob us of the counsel and instructions of our spiritual father. We should not waste our time in trying to remember some new sin ; but should bear in mind the instructions of the priest and resolve to put them into practice.

#### ABSOLUTION.

**1. Are our sins forgiven as soon as we have confessed them ?**

*No ; they are not forgiven until we have received absolution.*

Absolution is an essential part of the Sacrament of Penance : it is the sentence of pardon, which the priest pronounces in the name and by the commission of Christ. Christ has appointed his priests to be the judges of consciences, with power to *absolve* or *not*, as the case may require : “ Whose sins *you shall forgive*, they are forgiven them ; and whose sins *you shall retain*, they are retained.” (John xx., 23.)

There is a man who, of his own free will, has made himself a slave of sin, a slave of the devil. Now who shall free him from the bonds of sin and hell, and open to him the gates of heaven ? Who shall transform him from a slave of the devil to a child of God ? Shall we call upon the angels and the saints of heaven ? The saints of heaven are the friends of God, and God honors them by hearing their prayers. They may pray for the sinner. They may obtain for him great graces, but they cannot free him from a single sin. Neither St. Michael the archangel, nor the guardian angel, nor even the blessed Mother of God, has power to forgive even one single venial sin.



Although the power of forgiving sin has not been given to any of the saints of heaven, yet this great power was given by Jesus Christ to his apostles and their lawful successors, the bishops and priests.

## **2. In what words does the priest give absolution ?**

*In these : " I absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."*

When the priest says : " I, by his (Christ's) authority, absolve thee from thy sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," he not only declares that the sinner is forgiven, but he forgives him as really and effectually as if Christ himself pronounced the absolution, because the priest acts in the name, and by the authority, of Christ. The priest raises his hand, he pronounces the words of absolution, and, in an instant, quick as a flash of light, the chains of hell are burst asunder, and the sinner becomes a child of God. So great is the power of the priest, that the judgments of heaven itself are subject to his decision; the priest absolves on earth, and God absolves in heaven. " Whatsoever you shall bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever you shall loose on earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. xviii., 18.) These are the ever-memorable words which Jesus Christ addressed to the apostles and to their successors in the priesthood.

Suppose our Saviour himself were to come down from heaven, and were to enter a confessional to hear confessions. Now, let a priest enter another confessional, for the same purpose. Suppose two sinners go to confession, both equally well disposed, equally contrite. Let one of these go to the priest, and the other to our Saviour himself. Our

Lord Jesus Christ says to the sinner that comes to him: "I absolve thee from thy sins;" and the priest says to the sinner that goes to him: "I absolve thee from thy sins." Now the absolution of the priest will be just as valid, just as powerful, as the absolution of Christ himself.

At the end of the world, Jesus himself will judge all men; "for the Father judges no one, but he has left all judgment to his divine Son." But as long as this world lasts, Jesus Christ has left all judgment to his priests. He has vested them with his own authority, with his own power. "He that heareth you," he says, "heareth me." He has given them his own divine Spirit. "Receive ye the Holy Ghost; whosoever sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven; and whosoever sins you shall retain, they are retained."

The priest is the ambassador, the plenipotentiary of God. He is the coöperator, the assistant of God, in the work of redemption. This is no exaggeration, it is the inspired language of the apostle; "*Dei adjutores sumus.*" (1 Cor. iii.) "We are the coöperators, the assistants, of God." It is to the priest that God speaks when he says, "Judge between me and my people"—"*Judica inter me et vineam meam.*" (Is. v.) "This man," says God, speaking to the priest, "is a sinner; he has offended me grievously; I could judge him myself, but I leave this judgment to your decision. I will forgive him as soon as you grant him forgiveness. He is my enemy, but I will admit him to my friendship as soon as you declare him worthy. I will open the gates of heaven to him as soon as you free him from the chains of sin and hell."

Can a priest give or refuse absolution, just as he pleases? No; priests are not the *masters*, but "the *dis-*

*persers* of the mysteries of God.” They must follow the rules prescribed by the Church ; and must act, to the best of their judgment, as Christ himself would act ; otherwise they will have a very severe account to give. A judge must pronounce sentence *according to the laws*. Christ has given power to absolve, but on certain conditions, viz., that the sinner *confess, repent, resolve* to amend, and be willing to make satisfaction. When the priest has *reason* to believe that *any one* of these is wanting, he must defer absolution, otherwise he would ruin both his own soul and the soul of the penitent. You see, then, how unreasonable it is for any one to take it ill, when absolution is deferred : he who does take it ill, shows great ignorance, and also his want of the proper dispositions ; he shows, thereby, that the priest was *right* in refusing absolution. With such dispositions, the absolution would be of no service to the penitent ; on the contrary, it would add to his sins the guilt of *sacrilege*.

What kinds of persons must be *refused* absolution ?

1. They who will not correct, or use the means to correct, their bad habits, cannot be absolved ; for every sinner *must* resolve to employ the necessary means of amendment.

2. They who will not quit and avoid the immediate occasions of sin cannot be absolved. No one *can* be a true penitent unless he resolves to avoid the immediate occasion of sin ; for how can any one be really disposed to forsake sin if he wilfully continues to frequent the occasions of sin ? “ He that loveth the danger shall perish in it.” “ If thy right eye scandalize thee (i. e., cause thee to offend God,) pluck it out, and cast it from thee ; and if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee ; for it is

better that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body be cast into hell." By these words we are given to understand that the occasions of sin, however near or dear they may be to us, *must* be renounced if we would escape eternal condemnation. Hence, the Ritual positively says: "*Let not the priest absolve those who will not quit the immediate occasions of sin.*"

3. They who will not be reconciled to their enemies are likewise incapable of receiving absolution, for, "if you will not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offences."

4. Neither can they be absolved who will not (when able) make restitution or reparation for the injustice which they have committed against their neighbor; or who will not pay their just debts.

When a penitent has already promised, in several confessions, to avoid the occasions of sin, to be reconciled to his enemies, to make restitution, etc., and has always neglected to fulfil those promises when it was in his power to do so, he cannot expect that such promises will be again relied on; for he, himself, as well as his confessor, must have sufficient reason to doubt of their sincerity. Such a penitent, therefore, must *fulfil* his promises *before* he can be considered sufficiently disposed for receiving absolution.

### 3. What priests can give absolution?

*Only those who are authorized to do so by the Pope, or the bishop of the diocese.*

Our Lord Jesus Christ gave to his apostles and their lawful successors power to consecrate and offer the Holy Eucharist as the sacrifice of the New Law; and also power to forgive and retain sins. This twofold power is called



the power of order. Jesus Christ also bestowed upon his apostles the authority to exercise this power of order. He gave them what is called a commission: that is, the right to exercise their spiritual office in behalf of the faithful. This authority is called the *power of jurisdiction*. The power of order, or the power to offer up the holy sacrifice of the Mass and to administer the sacraments, is called power over Christ's natural body. The power of jurisdiction, or the power to forgive and to retain sins and to govern the faithful, is called power over Christ's mystical body. This twofold power constitutes the essence of the priesthood, and resides in its fulness, first, in the bishop of Rome, the successor of St. Peter, whom our Lord appointed pastor of his entire flock, to whom he gave the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and next, in the body of the bishops in union with the See of St. Peter. The fulness of jurisdiction, however, resides in the Pope alone. From him each bishop holds his jurisdiction over the territory assigned to him. Episcopal jurisdiction has been instituted by Christ in such a manner that each bishop receives his jurisdiction from the Pope, who makes the bishops sharers in the power of the keys. This power of the keys Christ gave to Peter alone, and, in his person, to his lawful successors. "The Lord," says Tertullian, "has given the keys to St. Peter, and through him to the body of the Church." St. Gregory of Nyssa says the same, in other words: "Through Peter, Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven to the bishops." As Peter and his successors alone have received the keys of the kingdom of God, they alone can communicate to others the power to use them. This jurisdiction, given by the Pope, may also be taken away by the Pope.

Besides the Pope and the bishops, there are other legitimate pastors, called parish-priests, or missionary priests, who are subject to their respective bishops. As the bishop possesses the plenitude of the priesthood, he enjoys by *divine right*, that is, by Christ's institution, a superiority, not only of precedence and of honor, but even of authority, over all his priests who, without his good will and pleasure, can do nothing in ecclesiastical matters. He is the pastor of his whole diocese. He can, therefore, give to this or that priest jurisdiction more or less extended. For good reasons he can also restrict the jurisdiction which he has given, and even withdraw it altogether. Without jurisdiction, a priest, even though lawfully ordained, is like a judge who has not as yet been appointed to any court of justice, or to whom no circuit has been assigned. The Pope, alone, can give power to a priest to forgive and retain sins in any part of the world; a bishop can give this power only in his own diocese. Hence, if a priest has jurisdiction in one diocese only, he cannot forgive sins in another diocese until he has first obtained jurisdiction from the bishop of that diocese. The Church, however, gives power to every priest, even to one who is suspended or excommunicated, to absolve a dying Christian, truly contrite, from all sins and censures.

#### **4. What graces does the absolution of the priest convey to the soul?**

*It remits: 1, the sins committed after baptism; 2, the eternal punishment, and, at least, a part of the temporal punishment, due to our sins; 3, it restores sanctifying grace, or increases it, if it has not been lost; and, 4, it also gives special graces, which enable us to lead a holy life.*

Sin is so great an evil that, were all the men on earth, were all the saints and angels of heaven, to perform the most rigorous penances,—were they to sacrifice every thing for the love of God, yet, with all their good works, they would not be able to blot out one single mortal sin ! Nay, even the fierce fires of hell, though burning throughout all eternity, can never destroy a single mortal sin. To have the power of moving mountains is great ; but to have the power of removing sin from the soul is something far greater. To have the power to raise the dead to life is wonderful ; but to have the power to raise the dead soul to life is still more wonderful. To have the power to create new worlds is to partake of God's own Omnipotence ; but to have the power of forgiving, of destroying sin, is to hold the very place of God himself,—it is to perform one of the greatest works of God's almighty power. Now this great work, this great miracle, is performed hundreds of times by the priest. It is in the Sacrament of Penance that he raises to the life of grace, the souls of those who have lost the life of grace given to them in baptism. “ The hour cometh and now is,” say our Lord, “ when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.” (John v.)

Lazarus was dead : his dead body had been lying in the grave four days. Jesus came, and stood beside his grave. He cried out with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth !* The voice of Jesus sounded in the ears of that body which was cold and stiff in death. Presently, he that had been dead came forth ! Now look at a soul lying dead in the grave of mortal sin. The words of absolution have not yet been pronounced over that soul ; it is still lying in the grave, cold and stiff in death. But life is not far off : the priest has begun to say the words of absolution ; already the light of

life comes on the dead soul. But, how? As yet only like the flash of a candle on the pale face of a dead body. The priest is breathing the words of absolution, in the name and by the power of the Son of God. Still, that soul lies cold and stiff in death. The words of absolution go on; still there is no sign of life in the soul. The angels are crowding round to see the great wonder that is going to take place—*there surrection of a soul from death to life!* So men would crowd round a grave where a dead body was going to be raised to life. The words of absolution are nearly finished. The priest has said, *By the authority of Jesus Christ—I absolve thee*—(only one more word is wanting—it comes!) *from thy sins*. It is done! In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, that soul is risen to life; the breath of life has been breathed into it, and now it is a *living soul*. Well may the angels come, in crowds, to see such a sight. They know that to raise a dead body to life costs God nothing. But to raise a dead soul to life, cost God thirty-three years of pain and labor.

In the little book, *Triumph of the Blessed Sacrament over Beelzebub*; or, *History of Nicola Aubry*, who was possessed by Beelzebub and several other evil spirits, we read the following:

“One day, during one of the exorcisms in church, the evil spirit was chattering and uttering all kinds of nonsense. Suddenly he stopped short and gazed fixedly at a young man who was eagerly forcing his way through the crowd in order to have a nearer view of the possessed woman. The devil saluted him in a mocking tone: ‘Good-morning, Peter,’ said he, calling him also by his family name. ‘Come here and take a good view of me. Ah! Peter, I know that you are a free-thinker; but, tell me, where were



you last night ?' And then the devil related, in presence of every one in the church, a shameful sin that Peter had committed the preceding night. He described all the circumstances with such precision that Peter was overwhelmed with confusion, and could not utter a word. 'Yes,' cried the devil, in a mocking tone, 'you have done it; you dare not deny it.'

"Peter hurried away as fast as he could, muttering to himself: 'The devil tells the truth this time. I thought that no one knew it but myself, and God.'

"Peter seemed to have forgotten that the devil is the witness of our evil actions, that he remembers them all well, and that, at the hour of death, he will bring them all against us, as he himself declared. 'For it is thus,' he added in a rage, 'that I take revenge on sinners.' Peter had not been to confession for many years, and, as a natural consequence, his morals were not exactly of the purest order. He had been guilty of gross sins which, in the fashionable world, go by the name of 'pardonable weaknesses,' 'slight indiscretions,' etc. The public accusation of the devil filled him with wholesome confusion. He rushed into a confessional, cast himself at the feet of the priest, confessed all his sins with true contrition, and received absolution. After having finished his confession, Peter had the boldness to press through the crowd once more; but this time he kept a respectful distance from his infernal accuser. The exorcist saw Peter, and, knowing that he had been to confession, he told him to draw near. Then, pointing to him, the priest said to the devil: 'See here, do you know this man?'

"The devil raised his eyes, and leisurely surveyed Peter from head to foot, and from right to left. At last, he said:

“ ‘Why, really, it is Peter.’

“ ‘Well!’ said the priest, ‘do you know anything else about him?’

“ ‘No,’ answered the devil, ‘nothing else.’

“The devil then had no longer any knowledge of Peter’s sins, because they had been entirely blotted out by the blood of Jesus Christ in the holy sacrament of confession.”

2. *By absolution eternal punishment is remitted as well as part of the temporal punishment due to sin.*

There is a sinner. He has not yet received absolution. His soul is still lying in chains—the chains of eternal punishment deserved by mortal sin. They are great, heavy, clanking chains. They are strong as the gates of hell. Those chains go into the soul. They have eaten their way into the inmost spirit. Corruption and rottenness have grown up from the soul into the links of those chains, and made them one with itself. Those chains go round the soul and into every faculty of the soul. The soul looks as if it was buried out of sight in those chains. Who can break those terrible chains in pieces? No man, no spirit, no devil, no angel can break them. All men and angels and devils, together, cannot break the least ring of those chains. Poor soul! there is a God above *who heareth the groans of them that are in fetters*. (Ps.) There is a God who is able to break these chains, who wants to break them if you only want it yourself. And, since you have come to confession, God will break these chains. But wait a little. The priest is saying the words of absolution. Those words of themselves could do nothing. But the endless force and the almighty power of the blood of Jesus are in those words. Another moment!—the words of absolution have struck the chains off the sinner, like a flash of lightning. Those

chains are snapped and broken in pieces as if they were but a bit of thread. The sinner is free ! (Ps. cxxxv.) With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, God has burst the iron bonds of eternal punishment.

He who is in the state of mortal sin deserves severe punishments, not only in hell, but even in this world. Although absolution frees the sinner from the chains of eternal punishment, yet it generally does not free him from all the temporal punishment due to sin. The temporal punishment that remains must be endured in this world, or averted by penance and good works, otherwise the soul will have to satisfy God's justice in the flames of purgatory. God, however, in his infinite mercy, by the absolution of the priest, remits a considerable portion of the temporal punishment due to sin.

In the revelations of St. Bridget (Lib. vi., c. 27.) we read that there was a rich man, as noble by birth as he was vile and sinful in his habits. By an express compact, he had given himself to the devil, and for sixty successive years had served him, leading a most infamous life, and never approaching the sacraments. This prince at last came to die ; and Jesus Christ, to show him mercy, appeared to St. Bridget, and commanded her to tell her confessor to go and visit him, and exhort him to confess his sins. The confessor went ; but the sick man said that he was not in need of confession, as he had often approached the Sacrament of Penance. The priest went a second time ; but the poor slave of hell persevered in his obstinate determination not to confess. Jesus again appeared to St. Bridget, and told her to request her confessor to return. He did so. On this occasion, the priest said to the sick man ; "I suppose you do not know who sent me

to you three times to hear your confession. It is Jesus Christ himself; for he appeared three times to his great servant, Bridget, and each time requested me, through her, to exhort you to make your confession, as he wished to show you mercy." On hearing this the dying man was touched, and began to weep. "But how can I be saved," he exclaimed, "I who for sixty years have served the devil as his slave, and have committed innumerable sins?" "My son," answered the priest, encouraging him, "do not lose courage; if you repent of your sins I promise you pardon, in the name of God." Then, gaining confidence, the dying man said to the confessor: "Father, I looked upon myself as lost, and already despaired of salvation; but now I feel a sorrow for my sins which gives me confidence, and, since God has not yet abandoned me, I will make my confession." And he made his confession four times on that day, with every mark of true sorrow, and, on the following morning, received communion. On the sixth day, he died, contrite and resigned. After his death, Jesus Christ again appeared to St. Bridget, and told her that this sinner was saved; that he was in purgatory, and that she should pray for his release.

3. *Absolution restores sanctifying grace, or increases it if it be not lost.*

Our dear Saviour tells us in the Gospel that there is great joy in heaven over every sinner that does penance. Now when a sinner is on his knees, making his confession, God looks at him from heaven and says to his angels: "My dear angels, I have tidings of great joy to tell you. This day another name will be written in heaven. See, that poor sinner is on his knees in the church making his confession. The moment of his absolution is at hand. It is



my intention to go down myself and dwell in his soul; I want you to make that soul a fit dwelling-place for the Majesty of God. You will clothe that soul in garments of glittering whiteness, which is *the justification of the saints*. (Apoc. xix.) Carry, therefore, from heaven a most beautiful, precious robe for that soul." Now the angels are going down to the earth carrying that beautiful robe of *Divine Grace* for the happy soul. That robe is whiter than snow, brighter than the sun, richer than gold or silver, or precious stones. Already the priest has begun to breathe into that soul the words of absolution. The angels wait in silence. The words of absolution are finished. The angels are clothing the soul with the beautiful robe of divine grace.

How beautiful is that soul! Solomon, in all his glory, was not clothed like that soul. (Ps. cx.) Glory and riches are in his house. But now God himself is coming down from heaven to that soul; "*we will come to him and make our abode with him.*" (John xv.) When God comes past the sun it does not stop to wonder, for it knows not that the Creator is going past. When God comes near the earth the trees do not bend down to the ground, for they do not know that the Majesty of God is near. And now the Glory of God is in that soul. (Ps. xlv.) *God is in the midst thereof*. It is the same God who came down on Mount Sinai; and the Jews were told not to go near the mountain, lest they should die, if they went so near to God. And now God is in that soul. He speaks his first word; he says: *This is my beloved son*, and he gives the kiss of peace to the happy soul.

4. *Absolution gives also special graces which enable us to lead a holy life.*

When Almighty God, by absolution, comes from heaven into the soul, he does not come with empty hands. He brings with him most precious and beautiful presents for the soul, such as no eye hath seen, no ear hath heard of. See, the virtues of God, and the seven-fold gifts of the Holy Ghost, are glittering in that soul like the stars in the sky. God speaks again: "My son," he says, "be of good heart, your sins are forgiven by absolution. You may thank Jesus for this blessed grace, because he bought it for you with his precious blood. There was a decree against you which condemned you to hell. But know that in this very hour the handwriting of that decree has been blotted out. And now, besides all the gifts you have received, I give you another excellent gift on account of absolution: that gift is *Sacramental Grace*,—that is, I make you a solemn promise, and *I will be mindful for ever of my covenant*. (Ps. cx.) I promise that, whenever you are tempted to sin again, if you will pray to me I will hear you, and the grace of the Sacrament of Penance shall keep you from sin; *so you are girt with strength that your ways may be blameless*. (Ps. xvii.) And now you are again an heir of the kingdom of heaven. Be faithful until death, and you shall receive the crown of life."

*The Angel of the Lord shall encamp round about them that fear him and shall deliver them.* (Ps. xxxiii.)

Now God speaks to the angels who are standing round in joy and wonder. "My dear angels," God says, "I give you charge over this soul; to each of you I give a sword of flaming fire turning in every direction, as I gave to the angel in paradise. Guard this soul and keep it from evil spirits, for they will seek to take away the heavenly life it has now received."

To the Angel Guardian of the soul, God says : " Dear angel, rejoice, because this soul over which you have to watch was dead and is now living again. Feed it daily with holy thoughts and the lights of heaven. Its works have long been only dead works, but now it shall be like a tree planted *near running waters which shall bring forth its fruit in due season.* (Ps. 1). After this every work will be a living work. Therefore take into your hand the Book of Life. Go with this, my son, in all his ways ; whatsoever he shall do in thought, word, and deed, write it down on the pages of the Book of Life. When the few days of his earthly career are ended, and when, after death, he shall stand before me to be judged, I will give him a reward in heaven exceedingly great, for every thought, word, and action I shall find written in that book."

There is joy in heaven over this soul which has done penance. That joy goes far and wide through heaven ; it is endless, like heaven itself ; all the countless millions of angels are rejoicing over that soul which was dead and is come to life again. They look at the soul, in wonder. "*Who is it,*" they say, "*that cometh forth as the morning, rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army in battle array ?*" (Cant.) When we see a person coming from confession, how little do we think of the wonderful things that have been done in his soul !

5. Absolution revives the merits of the previous good works which were performed in the state of grace, and lost by sin. By bestowing sanctifying grace upon us in the Sacrament of Penance, Almighty God restores us to that likeness to himself which we lost by mortal sin, and infuses into our soul a certain quality, in virtue of which we are truly his friends, his children and heirs of the kingdom of

heaven. This state of friendship, adoption and holiness, is the preparation for a state of glory in heaven, and is called *habitual grace*, because it is given to remain in us as long as we avoid mortal sin. Now, as long as we are in this happy state of grace, God keeps an account of all our good works, in order that he may bestow upon us a reward for them in heaven, and such a reward as no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and which it has never entered into the heart of man to conceive. Such works are called by theologians *living works*; because, being prompted by charity and performed in charity, they are vivified by the principle of eternal life—the life of grace. Should we, however, have lived for a hundred years, in the practice of the most rigorous penances, and should we have acquired the virtues and merits of the greatest saints in heaven, we lose sanctifying grace and the merit of all our good works, the moment we commit a mortal sin. This is no exaggeration. God himself declares it to us in the plainest terms: “If the just man forsake the path of justice and commit sin, I shall no longer remember his good works,” saith the Lord. (Ezech. xviii., 2.) As a severe frost deprives tender plants of all verdure and vitality, so does mortal sin strip good works of their life: that is, of all that makes them pleasing to God and deserving of eternal reward. These works, however, may revive, as the chilled plants revive in spring. Then they are called *revived* works,—renewed and restored to life. Now this happens when, in the Sacrament of Penance, we rise from the state of sin to the state of grace “Then it is,” says St. Francis de Sales, “that all our works, which were withered by sin, revive and resume their former vigor and freshness.”

Oh, the great, wonder-working words of absolution! See



the sinner after confession : his countenance is radiant with beauty ; his step has become again light and elastic ; he has thrown off the load that bent him to the earth ; his soul, being once more free and the companion of angels, reflects even upon his features, the holy joy with which it is inebriated ; he smiles upon those whom he meets, and every one sees that he is happy. He has again entered that sweet alliance with God, whom he can now justly call his Father ; he trembles now no more when he lifts his eyes to heaven ; he hopes, he loves ; he sees himself reinstated in his lost dignity—he is once more a child of God. Now that his soul rules the body, a supernatural strength animates him ; he feels himself burning with zeal and energy to do good ; a new sun has risen upon his life, and his soul puts on the freshness of youth.

Confession is resurrection, a sweet resurrection, indeed. Oh, invention of love ! what happiness, what consolation dost thou bring us ? Ah ! how unhappy are they who know not the consolation of confession, who know not the unutterable peace that flows from this healing fountain !

O confession ! precious pledge of the immense love of our divine Master ! Oh ! the sweet, the delicious tears, with which thou bedewest our cheeks ! Oh ! the gnawing remorse which thou dost banish from our hearts ! What undefinable happiness, what unspeakable peace, dost thou bring to poor sinners ! How many who live in the lap of ease and affluence, who are clothed in purple and gold, have searched the whole world to find a little peace for their souls, and have found it at last only in confession !

Fortune, with an unsparing hand, lavished all her favors upon them, and the world showered on them all its honors. Health and strength were given to them ; and still their

life was a burden and weighed heavily upon them. They came at last into the confessional. They revealed those hidden sins that weighed so heavily upon their conscience, and they instantly found that which they looked for in vain through the world—they found, that greatest, that most desirable good: peace of mind and rest for their tortured conscience.

Among the thousands of examples which might be quoted, we will mention merely the instance of the brave officer who was converted by a sermon of Father Brydaine.

Wishing to hear so illustrious a preacher, the officer entered the church at the very moment that this pious priest was speaking on the advantages of a general confession. The officer, convinced by his arguments, immediately formed the resolution of going to confession. Accordingly, he went to the pulpit, spoke to Father Brydaine, and resolved to make his confession; and made it with all the sentiments of a true penitent. It seemed to him, as he himself said, that a heavy load was taken off his heart. The day on which he had the happiness of receiving absolution saw him bathed in tears as he left the confessional—in those sweet tears that love and gratitude drew in torrents from his eyes. He followed the saintly father into the sacristy, and there, before a number of other missionaries, the faithful and edifying officer thus expressed the sentiment with which he was animated:

“Gentlemen, I beg you to listen to me, and you especially, Father Brydaine. Never in my life have I felt any pleasure equal to that which I feel since I have made my peace with God. Really, I do not believe that Louis XV., whom I have served for thirty-six years, can be happier than I am. No, the king, in all the magnificence that

surrounds his throne, though seated in the lap of pleasure, is not so contented and happy as I am since I shook off the horrible load of my sins."

And then, throwing himself at Father Brydaine's feet, and seizing his hands: "Oh, how thankful I ought to be to God," said he, "for having led me by the hand, as it were, to this place. O Father! nothing was farther from my thoughts than that which you have induced me to do. I can never forget you. I beg you, pray to God that he may give me time to do penance; if he assists me I feel that nothing will be too difficult for me." Such is the joy of every repentant sinner after he has made a good confession.

Yes, the confessional is the threshold of our Father's house; it is at the confessional that the unhappy prodigal finds an indulgent Father, who pardons and embraces him. It is here that the sad tale of woe ever finds an attentive ear, that sorrow is never useless, and that the sigh from the repentant heart is always sure to penetrate the heart of God.

It is here that the sinner fills the office of accuser, accused, and witness; and the priest that of instructor and judge—and this in the presence of a God who instantly ratifies and executes the sentence. Here everything is divine, everything mysterious. Here justice and mercy unite in the kiss of peace. Here hell is closed for the guilty one, because he has laid open his heart. Here heaven comes down to the sinner, because the sinner humbles himself. Here the fires of God's judgments are quenched in the tears of repentance. Here, by one act of obedience and humility, the proud sinner cancels a whole life of iniquity and rebellion. Here shines again that light

which banishes doubt and remorse, and which establishes anew the interrupted communion of man with God. Let a man be ever so disfigured with crime, let him be so poor as not to have even a crust of bread, or let him be so rich that he does not even know his own wealth ; let him be so unhappy as not to have even a ray of hope, or so tortured by remorse that he cannot enjoy a moment's repose or an instant of forgetfulness ; and let him come to the confessional, let him cast himself on his knees ; he will find here an ear to listen to him, a power capable of absolving him, and a tender heart still able and willing to love him.

He shall not be required to make known either his name, his rank, or his position in society ; all that shall be required of him is that he have a hearty sorrow for his sins, and that he humbly obey that voice that invites him to repentance. God, who sees and knows all things, requires no more of him. See, already peace comes back to him and he has gained heaven ; pardon descends upon his head, and he who imparts it to him, in the name of God, knows but this : that he has absolved a sinner and made him unspeakably happy. Indeed, without confession, without this salutary institution, guilty man would fall into despair. Into what bosom could he cast the load that weighs so heavily on his heart ? Into his friend's ? Ah ! who can trust the friendship of men ! Would he make the trackless deserts his confidants ? Even the very deserts seem to re-echo continually to the upbraiding voice of his conscience. When nature and men are merciless, it is a touching thing to find a God ready to pardon. The Catholic religion, alone, is the first and only one that has joined together, like two sisters, innocence and repentance.



**5. What should we do whilst the priest is giving us absolution ?**

*We should renew our act of contrition with all the fervor of which we are capable.*

When our confessor is about to give us absolution, let us call to mind all the wonders wrought in the soul by the great Sacrament of Penance. Let us bow our head in the most respectful manner and make a fervent act of contrition. Let us be sorry for having offended so good and so merciful a God, and let us resolve rather to die than offend him again by mortal sin.

**6. What are we to do if we should not receive absolution ?**

*We should humbly follow the advice of the priest, render ourselves worthy of absolution by true amendment of life, and return to the priest at the appointed time.*

Should our confessor deem it advisable to defer absolution, we must humbly submit to his judgment ; he is our judge, physician and father. We should remember that, though the priest has the power to acquit and to condemn, he cannot use this power at random ; he is guided therein by the principles of theology. If he sees that the penitent is well disposed, and he has no special reason for deferring absolution, he is obliged to absolve the sinner immediately. If, however, he has reason to doubt of the dispositions of the penitent, or if he has clear and strong grounds to believe that the delay of absolution will do good, the priest should defer absolution. Moreover, if it is clear that the penitent is not properly disposed, the confessor is obliged to refuse him absolution. In all these cases it is the duty of the penitent to submit. To complain, when absolution is deferred or refused, is generally a clear sign that the penitent is not properly disposed.

### 7. What should we do after confession?

*We should remain in prayer for some time, and thank God for his great mercy to us.*

When we have finished our confession and returned to our place, we should again humble ourselves before God, and return thanks to him for having given us this life-giving sacrament. We should again make an act of contrition, renew our firm purpose of amendment, and beg of Jesus Christ, through the intercession of his Blessed Mother, to give us the grace to carry out our good resolutions. After a good confession we should be no longer the same. St. Ambrose relates, that a young man of Alexandria had the misfortune to commit a great sin. Ashamed of having given way to the temptation, and fearing that he should fall again if he remained at home, he resolved to quit Alexandria. He came to Rome, went to confession and submitted to the severe penance imposed upon him. At last, after several years, he returned to his native city, resolved to persevere in the good life he had begun. As he was passing along the streets of Alexandria, on his way to the house of his parents, he was accosted by his former companion in sin. She approached and bade him good day. Our young pilgrim regarded her with an astonished air, as though he did not recognize her. "Why?" said she, "do you not know me? I am *such-a-one*."—"That may be," said the young man, "but as for me, I am no longer *such-a-one*." And he continued his way without saying another word. This is precisely how we ought to act after having made a good confession.

If we have been slothful in the service of God, we must become fervent. If, before confession, we neglected our prayers, we must now say them regularly. If, before con-

fession, we were given to cursing and swearing, to missing Mass and working on Sundays and holidays of obligation; if we often grieved our parents and spoke uncharitable words; if we often sinned by excess in eating and drinking; if we frequently gave way to thoughts, words or actions contrary to holy purity; if we neglected to observe the days of abstinence: we must, after confession, bridle our tongue; we must regularly assist at Mass on Sundays and holy-days of obligation; we must love and respect our parents and be charitable to our neighbor; we must be pure in our morals; in a word, we must observe the commandments of God and his Church, to the best of our power, so that every one can notice in us a change for the better. This amendment after confession is the surest sign that our confession was good, and that we had sincere sorrow for our sins.

But if, on the contrary, we find by experience, that no change or amendment of life has followed our confessions, we have reason to suspect that our confessions were not good. I do not mean, however, to say, that, because a person falls sometimes into the same sins after confession, his confession was sacrilegious. A sudden and violent temptation may assail him, and he may fall again through human frailty. But, if he falls again and again, after every confession; if, after every confession, he repeats the same mortal sins—continues to frequent those places which have been the cause of his sin—neglects the remedies prescribed by his confessor; if, I say, this be the case, the penitent has great reason to fear that his confessions are bad, and that he has not sincere sorrow for his sins. A good confession necessarily implies a sincere sorrow for the past, and a firm purpose of amendment for the future. How,

then, can a sinner believe that his sorrow for the past was sincere, and his resolution of amendment firm, when he continually relapses into those sins which he so often and so solemnly renounced?

#### SATISFACTION.

##### **1. What is satisfaction ?**

*It is the performance of the penance which the priest gives us in confession.*

To understand well the Catholic doctrine of satisfaction, we must remember that every sin has two evil consequences: the guilt or stain which sin leaves on the soul, and the debt of punishment,—that is, the satisfaction which must be made to God in atonement for the insult offered him by sin. If the guilt of the sin be grievous, the punishment which it deserves is eternal; while in lighter sins the punishment is only temporal. The guilt of sin is blotted out by sincere repentance, and, when the sin is mortal, this repentance must be accompanied by the actual reception, or at least the earnest desire, of the Sacrament of Penance. When God pardons the sin, he always remits the eternal punishment due to it, and at least a part of the temporal punishment. After the sin is forgiven, God generally requires some temporal penalty or satisfaction. Holy Scripture mentions several instances of the remission of the guilt, while a part at least of the temporal punishment remained. Thus :

1. Though God forgave Adam's sin in paradise, he nevertheless inflicted on him severe temporal punishments, and continues still to inflict temporal punishment upon all his posterity. (Gen. iii., 17-24.)

2. Moses, for the sin of diffidence which he committed



in striking the rock twice, was punished, even after he was forgiven, by not being allowed to enter into the Promised Land. (Num. xx., 7-12.)

3. David's sin of vanity in numbering the people was punished, even after he repented, by the destruction of 70,000 of his subjects through a pestilence. (1 Paral. xxi., 9-14).

4. His sins of adultery and murder were likewise severely punished, even after the prophet Nathan had declared that his sins were remitted. (2 Kings xii., 13, 14.)

These, and many similar examples, clearly show that God does not pardon our sins, except on condition that we do penance for them. Hence the penitents of the Old Testament, when begging of God to pardon their sins, never asked to be entirely exempted from punishment, but only not to be chastised according to the full rigor of divine justice. They wished to escape the more signal effects of God's wrath; but they were willing to submit to the fatherly correction with which he should be pleased to visit them. "Rebuke me not, O Lord, in thy indignation," said the royal prophet, "nor chastise me in thy wrath." And farther on, he declares himself ready to do penance for his sins: "I am ready for scourges." The prophet Jeremias begs of God to correct him, "but not in his fury."

In the New Law, God still requires the same satisfaction of every Christian who has the misfortune to fall into sin; and this with so much the more reason, as the sins committed against the Christian Law, which is more holy and perfect, deserve more rigorous punishment. For this reason our Saviour says, that, on the day of judgment we must render an account of every idle word. (Matt. xii., 36.) After death, we shall have to give an account of our sins

and receive the punishment due to them. This punishment shall not be eternal; it will be a temporary punishment which we must undergo, and by which we must satisfy in the other life if we have not satisfied during this.

St. Gregory the Great says, that David merited, by the humble confession of his sins, to hear from the prophet that God had pardoned him; yet, after he was forgiven, he was punished in various ways for these very sins. The holy Pope then concludes with these remarkable words: "God never forgives any sin without inflicting some punishment for it." "You show, O Lord," says St. Augustine, "mercy to him who confesses his sin; but on this condition alone, that he will punish himself;" and thus justice and mercy will both be satisfied—Justice will be satisfied because sin is punished: mercy, because sin is pardoned. "Yes," exclaims St. Pacian, "a Christian who has sinned should never forget to do penance for his sins, in order to appease the wrath of God and to satisfy his justice."

Now as God, in his infinite mercy, is ready to forgive us, in the Sacrament of Penance, the guilt of sin and the eternal punishment due to it, he wishes that we, on our part, should be ready to accept a temporal punishment to satisfy his justice. It is on this condition only that he is willing to forgive us in the Sacrament of Penance. Hence he has made this readiness of our will to accept and perform a penance, an essential part of this sacrament; and the priest is to enjoin a penance before he gives absolution, in order to find out whether the penitent is disposed to make satisfaction to God's justice. Hence the penance enjoined by the priest in confession is called *sacramental* satisfaction. *Sacramental* satisfaction is either *intended* or *actual*.

By intended satisfaction is meant the desire of doing the penance enjoined in confession. By *actual* satisfaction is understood the real performance of the sacramental penance.

*Intended* satisfaction, or the desire of satisfying God's justice for our sins, and repairing, as far as we can, the offence we have given him by sin, is an essential part of true repentance, and, therefore, is absolutely required for the validity of the sacrament. True contrition necessarily includes a firm purpose of observing all God's commandments. Now, to repair the offence given to God is certainly one of his commandments. Hence the desire and intention of satisfying God's justice is absolutely necessary, in order to obtain the forgiveness of our sins. Should a sinner, for instance, while confessing, not have the honest intention to perform the penance enjoined, the confession would be null and void. As the sins of the penitent are remitted when the absolution is pronounced by the priest, it is clear that the forgiveness of sins does not depend on the *actual* performance of the penance. All that is required for the validity of the sacrament is, that the penitent should accept the penance and have the honest intention of fulfilling it. So that if the penitent were to change his mind, after confession, or neglect to perform his penance, or to die before he had performed it, his past sins would nevertheless be forgiven. By neglecting his penance, however, he would commit a new sin.

**2. What should we do if we know that we are not able to perform the penance which the priest has given us ?**

*We should request him to give us another, which we are able to perform.*

The temporal punishment which may remain due to sin

after the sin has been forgiven, is much greater than some persons imagine. The Council of Trent teaches that the satisfactions enjoined by the confessor should bear some proportion to the sins and to the ability of the penitent: "The priests of the Lord, therefore, as far as prudence may suggest, ought to enjoin a salutary and suitable satisfaction, according to the quality of the sins and the ability of the penitent; lest, if, haply, they deal too indulgently with penitents, by enjoining certain very light works for very grievous crimes, they thereby be made partakers of other men's sins. Moreover let them have in view, that the satisfaction which they impose be not only to preserve the penitent in virtue . . . but also to avenge and punish his past sins." (Sess. 14, de Pœnit., c. 8.) The practice of the primitive Church, as recorded in the penitential canons, may serve to give us some idea of the satisfactions which, in those days, the Church required, as bearing some proportion "to the quality of the sins and ability of the penitent." No more was required of penitents, in those first ages, than was justly and strictly due; nor indeed so much. Now what was due *then* is due *now*; because divine justice is essentially the same at all times.

That you may see what the ancient penances were, I will quote a few of the penitential canons:

1. They who denied the faith, even though it were to save their life, were required to do penance for *ten years*.

2. They who had joined in pagan worship, had to do penance for *two years*.

3. They who had taken a false oath, *forty days on bread and water*.

4. They who had broken a fast, *twenty days on bread and water*.



5. They who had cursed their parents, *forty days*.
6. They who had struck their parents, *seven years*.
7. They who had done an injury to their parents, *three years*.

Similar penances were inflicted for other mortal sins ; and, in some cases, the penance was *for life*.

It may be asked : “ Why are lighter penances enjoined *now*, seeing that sin requires, *at all times*, the same atonement ? ” Because as the spirit of fervor is relaxed, and the faith of Christians is less lively, the Church has accommodated herself to the weakness of her children, lest, if a severer penance were now enjoined, they should become guilty of mortal sin by neglecting to perform it, and so change the temporal punishment into one that is eternal. The penance enjoined now is not considered sufficient to expiate all the temporal punishment due to sin. Hence, the priest says : “ And *the rest* I leave to the merits of Christ, and to your own pious endeavors.” But, even at the present time, the Church admonishes her pastors to impose penances, “ as far as the spirit of prudence shall suggest, according to the quality of the crimes and ability of the penitent, lest they be made partakers of other men’s sins.”

Now, must the penitent accept and perform the penance enjoined by the priest ? He must ; because penance, as we have seen, is a necessary part of the sacrament, and is required by divine precept. However, if the confessor should propose a remedy or give a penance which circumstances render impossible, the penitent should explain humbly and respectfully why it is impossible for him to perform the imposed penance, and request the confessor to give him another instead.

How soon after confession must the penance be per-

formed? It must be performed within the time named by the confessor. Should he not name any fixed time, it ought to be performed soon; for "if the penance is grievous," says St. Alphonsus, "and especially if it is medicinal, it would be a mortal sin to defer the performance of it for a long time. Should a penitent have the misfortune to fall into mortal sin after confession, is he still obliged to perform the penance? Yes, he is obliged to perform it; and although he is in mortal sin, yet he complies with his obligation by performing it in that state.

### **3. What sin is it, not to perform the penance given in confession?**

*It is a venial sin to neglect wilfully a penance given for venial sins; and it is a mortal sin to neglect wilfully a penance given for mortal sins.*

"If the penance is light," says St. Alphonsus, "the omission of it is a venial sin; and it is a mortal sin to omit a grievous penance enjoined for mortal sin. If the performance of the penance enjoined should become very difficult, it may be changed either by the same confessor or by another."

### **4. Why does the priest give us a penance to perform after confession?**

*For the expiation of the temporal punishment due to sin, and also for the amendment of our life.*

In administering the Sacrament of Penance, the priest acts as judge, in the name and by the authority of Jesus Christ. As such, he has a twofold duty to perform—a duty towards God and a duty towards his neighbor. His duty towards God requires him to see that the penitent is willing to satisfy divine justice, at least in some measure, for

the insult offered to God by sin. The priest is, therefore, obliged to give the penitent a penance, to repair thereby the insult offered to God. The second duty of the priest is to give the penitent the means of amending his life, and of lessening, as far as possible, the temporary punishment due to sin. Almighty God, through his infinite mercy, and on account of the merits of Jesus Christ, accepts our penance as an expiation, at least in part, of the temporal punishment; and if such penance is performed in the proper spirit, it helps us to amend our life. It should be remembered, then, that when Jesus Christ gave to the pastors of his Church the power of loosing the sinner from his sins, he also gave them power to bind the conscience of the sinner and impose on him a suitable penance.

**5. Why does not God always remit the temporal punishment, together with the eternal?**

1. *Because God demands reparation for our sins.*
2. *Because such punishment is apt to give us a greater hatred for sin.*

The dispositions of a sinner may, indeed, be so perfect as to move God to remit at once both the sin and all the punishment due to sin. But this is not generally the case. The holy Council of Trent assigns two reasons why God does not remit the temporal punishment due to sins committed after baptism.

The first reason is this: The strict equity of divine justice requires that those who are not equally guilty, should not be treated in the same manner. It requires, for instance, that those who sinned before baptism, should be treated differently from those who sinned after baptism. As the former have sinned with more ignorance, and, be-

sides, have not received so many graces as Christians have, God forgives, by baptism, not only all their sins, but also all the punishment due to them. He grants them an entire pardon of all their sins, in favor of their first admission to the Christian religion. He treats otherwise, however, those who relapse into sin after baptism, as their faults are infinitely greater. They have a clearer knowledge of sin, and by sinning again, after having been delivered from the slavery of sin and the devil—after having received the grace of the Holy Ghost, by which their soul became the dwelling-place of God—they are guilty of treason and the blackest ingratitude. For these reasons, God does not usually pardon Christians with so much indulgence, but obliges them to make some satisfaction. “The equity of divine justice,” says the Council, (sess. 14, c. 8,) “requires that God should deal with those who, before baptism, sinned through ignorance, otherwise than with those who, having been once delivered from the slavery of sin and the devil, after having received the gifts of the Holy Ghost, have dared to violate the temple of God and sadden his Holy Spirit.” The Council then gives the second reason, which is drawn from the goodness of God: to wit, “that God’s goodness enjoins these punishments for our advantage.” It is in accordance with the divine bounty not to remit our sins without obliging us to some satisfaction; lest, by occasion of too much mildness, we should think our sins less than they really are, and thence take occasion to fall into greater sins, and to become offensive and contumelious to the Holy Ghost, and thereby draw upon ourselves the divine vengeance in the day of wrath. These satisfactory punishments have, without doubt, a wonderful virtue to turn penitents away from sin; they serve as a



bridle to restrain them, and they teach them to keep a stricter watch over themselves in the future. Moreover, these punishments cure those remains and disorders which sin has left in the soul, and root out, by the contrary virtuous acts, the vicious habits contracted by a disorderly way of living.

It may be asked : Will the penance enjoined in confession always satisfy for our sins and fully cancel the temporal punishment due to them ? We answer : No ; but whatever else is wanting may be supplied by other means.

Every sin leaves behind it a dark stain of guilt and a debt of punishment. In like manner, our virtuous actions produce two distinct effects. The first is called merit, and the second is satisfaction. By merit we mean a title to a reward, and by satisfaction something that atones for a past fault. There is a child ; he has been undutiful to his parents. He is sorry for his faults ; he now does all in his power to please them. By the promptness and diligence with which he carries out all their wishes, he not only pleases them and deserves to be rewarded, but he also atones for his former bad conduct. So is it with us in relation to our heavenly Father. Our good works render us not only more pleasing to God, and entitle us to a reward in heaven, but they also help to cancel the debt of punishment due to our sins.

Every voluntary good work, then, helps to lessen the punishment due to sin ; but a good work enjoined by the priest in confession possesses, moreover, a certain sacramental efficacy. The performance of the penance imposed by the confessor, will, therefore, remit a much larger portion of the temporal punishment due to sin than a similar work which was not thus imposed.

These sacramental penances have a twofold power of canceling the temporal punishment—the power derived from the good dispositions of the penitent, and the power derived from the sacrament itself. On this account, they are more efficacious than those penances which we choose ourselves.

The Church, however, has never taught that, by the performance of the sacramental penance alone, the whole debt of temporal punishment is canceled. On the contrary, from her doctrine of purgatory, and from her approval of the practice of founding perpetual masses for the souls of the faithful departed, it is evident that, even after the eternal punishment has been remitted, and after the sacramental penance has been performed, there still remains, very often, severe temporal punishment to be endured.

**6. By what other means may we obtain the remission of temporal punishment?**

1. *By gaining the indulgences which the Church grants us.* 2. *By earnestly asking of God to remit them.* 3. *By voluntary works of penance and charity.* 4. *By patience in our sufferings.*

Penitents very often make the great mistake of contenting themselves with the performance of the penance enjoined in confession. They imagine that they have done enough when they have performed this penance, though, in fact, it is often far lighter than their sins deserve.

Every sin deserves punishment in proportion to its grievousness. "The more we have offended," says St. Cyprian, "the more tears we ought to shed. The penance should be no less than the crime. The greater the crime, the greater should be the satisfaction. Satisfaction

being an act of justice, it should clearly bear some proportion to the offence. Now, if you consider the infinite majesty of God, who is provoked by your sin, if you reflect on your own ingratitude, if you remember how many benefits and favors you have slighted, and how many graces you have abused, you cannot possibly imagine that such short and small penances as are generally enjoined in confession, bear any proportion to your offences. If you know that you have committed not only one, but several most grievous sins, and that, on account of them, you have deserved to be forever punished with the devils in hell, how can you think that a few short prayers, said, perhaps, with little or no devotion, will be sufficient to atone for so many insults offered to God? Can you call this “bringing forth worthy fruits of penance?”

There lived in a certain town a young man, a model of virtue. One day he was walking alone along the highway. It was a holy-day in the place. On his way he met a young man, of very bad repute. They walked on together. At first they spoke about indifferent things; but the wicked young man made use of double-meaning words; laughed at what he called the silly scruples of the pious, and related some unbecoming stories as having happened to himself. Finally, he succeeded in persuading the young man to commit a great sin of impurity. Scarcely was the sin committed, when an accident befell the young man, hitherto so virtuous, and he was instantly killed. The other who had led him into sin, was now so terrified, that he went in haste to a monastery of the most strict observance. He sent for the superior, and, casting himself on his knees before him, he cried out with tears in his eyes: “O Father, have pity on a wretch who has had the misfortune to send

a soul to hell! Receive me into your house; I wish to do penance all the days of my life!"

The superior received the young man kindly, but said: "Your vocation must be tried first, before you can be received into the order."

The young man was willing to undergo any trial. After some time he was received into the order, where he became a perfect religious. Many a time he would cast himself at the threshold of the door, that the religious might walk over him, and he would say to all: "Have pity on a wretch who has sent a soul to hell!"

Let every one rest assured that there is more punishment due to his sins than he imagines. We should, therefore, endeavor to obtain the remission of the temporal punishment due to our sins, not only by sacramental penance, but also by other means, that is:

1. *By gaining indulgences.* An indulgence supplies what is wanting in our works of satisfaction.

2. The remission of temporal punishment may also be obtained by fervent prayer. We read in the Gospel that a certain master remitted the whole debt of his servant, because he was entreated to do so. "I forgave thee all thy debt, because thou besoughtest me." (Matt. xviii., 32.) So, also, will our dear Lord forgive us the debt of temporal punishment if we fervently and assiduously beseech him to do so. He has said: "Ask and you shall receive."

3. Voluntary works of penance and charity are another means to obtain the remission of temporal punishment. By works of penance we understand every kind of bodily and spiritual mortification. By bodily penances, we mortify the flesh, and deprive it of its pleasures and comforts. By spiritual penances, we mortify our passions and irreg-



ular desires. It is a very salutary penance to keep yourself always modest and recollected ; to speak always calmly and discreetly ; to mortify your curiosity.

Another excellent penance is the mortification of our intellect, judgment, will and self-love. We mortify the intellect by rejecting all vain imaginations, all useless and irrelevant thoughts. Such vain thoughts and imaginations cause us to lose our time, produce in us aversion to labor and to all serious employment, and become the source of thousands of temptations.

We mortify our judgment by yielding to the views of others ; that is, provided there is nothing therein contrary to the will of God.

We mortify our will by acting constantly according to the holy will of God.

We mortify our self-love by waging continual war against our evil inclinations and unruly temper.

He who continually mortifies his evil propensities will be filled with divine grace. If we punish ourselves, God will not punish us. He will remit the punishment we deserve for our sins. If we pardon nothing to ourselves, he will pardon everything. If we are strict with ourselves, he will be merciful to us.

A zealous missionary had once the good fortune to bring back to God a young man who led a very worldly life. His conversion was sincere and lasting. In fact, soon after the mission, the young man quitted the world and entered a strict religious order. Several years after, the missionary called to see the young man. They embraced each other cordially : "Well, my good friend," asked the missionary, "how do you get on in your new life ? Are you content ? Do you not find the religious life easy and

pleasant?" "Far from it," answered the young man. "The silence, the fasting and the vigils are as hard for me now as they were the first day of my entrance into the convent. My cell is like a prison. I never leave it to go to the choir, or elsewhere, without suffering new torments and new disgust." On hearing this the missionary felt sad. He hardly knew what to say. The young man noticed this. He threw his arms around the neck of the holy missionary, and pressed him to his heart. "O father!" he cried, with tears of joy, "my true father in Jesus Christ, you must not misunderstand me. All these trials become light and pleasant, when I think of the torments of hell, when I think how good God has been to me, to give me this opportunity of atoning for my sins; for this I thank God every day of my life."

By works of charity we understand both corporal and spiritual works of mercy. "Redeem thy sins with alms, and thy iniquities with works of mercy to the poor," said the holy prophet Daniel to King Nabuchodonosor. (chap. iv., 24.) Now, why is it that alms destroy sin, and the temporal punishment due to sin?

*First*—Because those who are merciful to others, obtain mercy, according to the words of Jesus Christ: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." (Matt. v., 7.) Alms, of course, do not remit mortal sin *directly*, (the remission of mortal sin being obtained only by confession,) but *indirectly*, because they are a powerful means to obtain from God the grace of sincere sorrow and amendment of life. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, (chap. x., 7,) that at Cæsarea there lived a certain centurion, named Cornelius, a religious man, *giving much alms, and always praying to God*. As he was yet a heathen, the Lord sent

him an angel, who told him to send for Peter, and be instructed in the true faith. Now, what induced our Lord to bestow this great grace upon this man? It was his great charity to the poor, as the angel of the Lord himself declared: "Thy prayers, and thy alms," said he, "have ascended for a memorial in the sight of God."

St. Eustace, also, while yet a heathen, was very charitable to the poor. Christ himself one day appeared to him, and persuaded him to become a Christian. He and his whole family were converted, and died as martyrs.

*Second*—Alms-giving is said to destroy sin, because the poor pray to God for their benefactors, and their prayers cannot remain unheard. "The Lord hears the sighs and prayers of the poor," says Holy Scripture. (Ps. x., 17.)

*Third*—To give alms is an act of charity; but "charity covers a multitude of sins," says the Apostle St. James. (chap. 5., 20.) On account of his great charity to the poor, the Emperor Zeno escaped temporal punishment. John Moschus, in his "Spiritual Meadow," tells us that this emperor had outraged the daughter of a certain lady. This lady went to church every day, and prayed to God to avenge her on the emperor. She prayed thus for several days, with tears in her eyes. At last, the Blessed Virgin appeared to her, and said that the hands of God were tied, and that he was prevented from punishing the emperor by his great charity to the poor. (chap. 175.) "Water," says Holy Scripture, "quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins." (Eccles. iii., 3.) "Yes," says St. Augustine, (lib. 21, civit. 37,) "there are some who cannot be saved without alms, because they are so deeply immersed in sin and irregular desires, that they cannot free themselves from their evil habits by means of the ordinary

graces of God ; they need a more powerful grace, which will be granted only through the prayers of the poor. Almsgiving is, then, like a propitiatory sacrifice offered to appease God. St. Paul writes : " Do not forget to do good, and ' to give liberally,' for by such sacrifices God's favor is obtained." (Heb. xiii., 16.) St. Ambrose calls almsgiving a *second baptism*. (Serm. 32.) " Should any one have committed sin after baptism, let him appease the Lord and purify his soul by alms-giving. For Christ has said : ' Give alms, and behold, all things are clean unto you.' " (Luke xi., 41.)

Lord Arpini and his wife made, in the year 1030, their last will, in the following manner : " When we commenced to reflect that we have been conceived and born in sin, and have, from our infancy, committed many faults, and how, on the day of judgment, we shall have to give a strict account of all our thoughts, words and actions, and how every one will receive from the eternal Judge according to his deserts ; and again, when we reflected how sinners will be cast into fire everlasting for having neglected to cancel their sins here below, and how the elect of God will enter into everlasting bliss : then, all on a sudden, our hearts felt deeply touched by the mercy of God, and we were filled with great fear and trembling. Whilst yet reflecting upon what we should do, we felt inspired to go and ask the advice of holy priests and religious men how we could cancel our innumerable sins, escape hell, and make sure of heaven. We were told that, in our circumstances, we could do nothing better than to give alms, and to build out of our own means, a church and a monastery in which monks might serve God in a holy manner, and chant his praises, according to the rule and constitutions of St.



Benedict, and might pray for us incessantly With the greatest pleasure we received this advice, and went by it. We built a church in honor of our Lord Jesus Christ and his mother, the Blessed Virgin Mary, and we made it over to the venerable Father Dominic and his monks, that they might serve and praise God therein." (Baronius.)

Alms-giving, however, is not only a propitiatory sacrifice; it is also a sacrifice of praise. *First*—Alms are given in honor and praise of God. *Second*—Alms make the poor praise God for having inspired the giver to relieve them in their necessities. *Third*—When others see this charity, they, too, praise God for it, and feel induced to imitate it. *Fourth*—As the charitable man bestows alms for the love of God, he often receives great consolation, even in this life, and therefore thanks and praises God for the grace of being able to give alms.

It is, indeed, a great act of mercy, on the part of God, to receive alms both as a sacrifice of praise and as a sacrifice of propitiation for sin.

4. Patience in our sufferings is another means to cancel the temporal punishment due to sin. We atone for our sins by suffering, in the spirit of penance, all our daily crosses and trials, the cares of life, the ailments of the body, the doubts and scruples of conscience which often harass us after confession; the loss of honor and wealth, public and private afflictions,—in a word, all the evils that afflict us in this life. All these afflictions and trials, if endured with patience and resignation, become, as it were, a sacrifice of propitiation to God and a powerful means of atoning for our sins.

5. One of the most powerful means of satisfying the justice of God for our sins, is the holy sacrifice of the Mass.

Holy Mass is a sacrifice of propitiation for the living and for the dead. In this sacrifice, Jesus Christ offers himself to his heavenly Father in satisfaction for our sins. To those, therefore, who hear Mass are applied the fruits of Christ's life, and especially of his sufferings and death upon the cross. During the holy sacrifice, the blood of Christ is offered up for those for whom the priest celebrates Mass, and also for those who are present and who hear Mass devoutly.

By hearing Mass devoutly, with the intention to atone thereby for our sins and to obtain the remission of all temporal punishment, we cancel our indebtedness to God quicker than by any other kind of good works.

When St. Margaret of Cortona was one day reflecting on the many grievous sins of her past life, she felt a great desire to atone for them as far as possible. She spoke to her confessor about this desire of hers, and asked him how she could quickest satisfy God's justice for all the sins she had committed. Her confessor told her that the quickest way to satisfy God's justice for our sins was to hear, with devotion, as many masses as possible. From that time forward, she was very careful not to miss a single opportunity of hearing Mass.

6. There is another great means by which we can obtain the full remission of all temporal punishment due to our sins. This great means is to accept death with perfect resignation to the holy will of God. Death is the last sacrifice that we can make to God. It is a sacrifice most difficult to make, because death is unnatural. It is a punishment inflicted on all men, in consequence of the sin of Adam. It is revolting to our nature, for man was not made to die. Now, to die perfectly resigned to the just and holy will of God, even in spite of our natural horror of death,

is to die with a merit similar to that of martyrdom. According to St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas, the merit of martyrdom does not consist merely in suffering so many horrible torments ; it consists rather in the conformity of the martyr's will to the holy will of God. Now, if God, instead of employing the hand of the executioner, makes use of some natural means, such as sickness, or an accident, to take away my life, and I accept death with as much resignation as a martyr, God will naturally give me the same reward as he gives to the martyrs. Now, our faith teaches that a martyr, after death, goes straight to heaven. If I die, then, with the dispositions and the merit of a martyr, my reward will be similar to his. Hence, not only those acquire the merit and crown of martyrdom who die for the faith, but also all those who cheerfully accept death for the love of God. Such a death is an act of perfect love, because by it we abandon and sacrifice ourselves, without reserve, to the holy will of God. Consequently, such an act of love cancels sin and the punishment due to it.

In order to be able to make this act of love at the hour of death, we should accustom ourselves to make it often during life. We should often make an offering of our life to God, declaring ourselves ready to accept, at any time, the kind of death which he has decreed for us from all eternity. As soon as the holy martyrs knew that they had to suffer martyrdom, they began to make frequent offerings of their life to God, in order thereby to unite their will perfectly to the holy will of God. For every such act they obtain in heaven a special reward. We should imitate their example, resting assured that we, too, shall receive in heaven, as many crowns as we have

made acts of entire abandonment of ourselves into the hands of God. We should daily beseech our Lord, most earnestly, to grant us the grace to accept death at his hands with the intention of pleasing him and doing his holy will.

7. Another and a very efficacious means to obtain from God the forgiveness of all temporal punishment due to our sins, is to forgive and to pray for our enemies. To pray for those who wish us evil, is an extremely difficult act, and one of heroic charity. It is free from self-love and self-interest, and it is not only counseled, but even commanded by our Lord. (Matt. v., 44.) If we forgive, nay, if we even beg God also to forgive, our enemies, we thereby sacrifice our honor, and thus raise ourselves to the great dignity of true children of God,—yea, even to an unspeakably sublime resemblance to his divinity, as our Lord himself declares: “If you pray for those who hate, calumniate and persecute you, you will be children of your Father who is in heaven; who maketh his sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and unjust.” (Matt. v., 45.) There is nothing more characteristic, more worthy of God, than to have mercy and to spare, to do good to his enemies, and thus to make them become his friends, his children, and heirs of his everlasting kingdom.

Now, by imitating God’s goodness in a point so averse to our nature, we give him the greatest glory; and do such violence to his tender and meek heart as to cause him not only to forgive the sins of our enemies, but also to grant all our prayers, the forgiveness of our sins, and the temporal punishment due to them.

Most touching is that which Father Avila relates of



St. Elizabeth of Hungary. One day this saint prayed to God to give great graces to all those who had in any way injured her; nay, even to give the greatest graces to those who had injured her most. After this prayer, our Lord said to her: "My daughter, never in your life did you make a prayer more pleasing to me than the one which you have just said for your enemies. On account of this prayer I forgive not only all your sins, *but even all temporal punishment due to them.*"

But some one, perhaps, will say: "I have no enemies. I have nothing to forgive. Hence, I cannot make use of this means to obtain the remission of the temporal punishment due to my sins." If this be the case, then say to Almighty God: "O Lord, if I had a thousand enemies, for thy sake I would forgive them, love them, and pray for them." You may also say to our Lord: "O my God, if it be thy will that I should be suddenly struck down by the hand of my enemy, without having even the time to make an act of forgiveness, I, now, for thy sake, not only forgive him, from the bottom of my heart, but I also beseech thee to bless him and convert him, that we both may love and praise thy boundless mercy for ever in heaven." Thus you will practise, at least in desire, the highest degree of charity, which, according to St. Francis de Sales, is to forgive our enemies; and rest assured that our dear Lord will take the will for the deed.

If, however, we have no opportunity to practise this degree of charity, in reality, we shall always find plenty of occasions to practise the degree next to it. This consists in bearing with our neighbor's whims, weaknesses, faults of character, disagreeable manners, and the like, trying to make ourselves all to all. The practice of this kind of

charity will equally move our Lord to grant us the pardon of all the temporal punishment due to our sins.

8. *Frequent confession.* The principal object of our life on earth should be to prepare ourselves for the eternal enjoyment of the vision of God in heaven. This preparation is made by leading a pure and holy life. We have already seen that, by a good general confession, great purity of soul and the remission of a very large portion of temporal punishment are obtained. Now, in order to preserve and increase this purity of soul, and to satisfy completely the justice of God for our sins, we ought to have frequent recourse to the Sacrament of Penance.

Blosius tells us how our dear Saviour said one day to St. Bridget, that in order to acquire his Spirit, and preserve the same when acquired, she should often confess her sins and imperfections to the priest. (*Monit. Spirit.*, c. v.)

The greatest gift God can bestow upon a soul is the gift of divine love. This gift of perfect charity he bestows on the souls that are spotless and pure in his sight. He imparts this gift to the soul, in proportion to her purity. It is certain that frequent confession is one of the most effectual means of speedily attaining great purity of soul; since, of its very nature, it helps us to acquire that cleanness of heart which is the crowning disposition for receiving the gift of divine love.

“Blessed are the clean of heart.” (Matt. v.) Some have imagined that cleanness of heart consists in an entire freedom from all sin and all imperfections whatsoever. But such cleanness of heart has been the privilege only of Jesus Christ and his ever-blessed mother, Mary. No one else can, without God’s special grace, lead so spotless a life, in this polluted world, as not to have contracted some stain.

St. Thomas Aquinas says that we can avoid each particular venial sin, but not all in general. And St. Leo the Great says of persons wholly devoted to God's service, that, owing to the frailty of our nature, not even such pious persons are free from the dust of trivial transgressions. (Serm. iv. de quadr.)

Since, then, cleanness of heart cannot mean an entire freedom from sin, it must imply two things: first, an exact custody of our hearts, and a strict watchfulness over our outward actions, in order to avoid, as far as possible, the committing of a single wilful fault. The stricter the watch which a person keeps over his actions, and the more successful he is in diminishing the number of his failings, the more unblemished will be his purity.

Secondly, as, in spite of all the caution we can take, we shall ever be contracting some slight defilement of soul, it will be necessary to be constantly careful to cleanse our hearts from the impurities which accumulate through the trivial faults into which we so frequently fall.

The cleanliness of a fine hall does not imply that no grain of dust shall ever fall upon the floor, walls, paintings, or furniture. Such cleanliness is not looked for even in a royal residence. It supposes only that the palace and its precincts be often swept and dusted, and that everything opposed to cleanliness be removed. A lady, however particular on the point of cleanliness, does not require that her garments should preserve their first whiteness, for that, she knows, is impossible; but she is careful to keep them from all stain, and to have them frequently washed and cleansed from such stains as they may have contracted. The same holds good with regard to purity of heart. This does not consist in entire freedom from faults

of every kind, but in carefully watching over ourselves, in guarding against every wilful defilement, and in frequently purifying our conscience.

Now these are precisely the two effects which frequent confession produces in the soul. Hence, we attain, by this means, more speedily than by any other, to that purity of soul which is the crowning disposition for receiving divine love. There is nothing in the world that can cleanse our garments as thoroughly as sacramental confession purifies our soul. In this sacrament the soul is cleansed in the bath of Christ's blood. The blood of Jesus purifies the soul from every defilement, and renders it whiter than the lily, and purer than the driven snow. This is what the apostle St. John assures us, when he says: "If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all iniquity." (1 John i., 9.)

No wonder, then, that so many of the saints confessed their sins every day. Such was the practice of St. Catharine of Sienna, of St. Bridget of Sweden, of Blessed Coletta, of St. Charles Barromeo, of St. Ignatius of Loyola, and of many others. St. Francis Borgia went to confession even twice a day. If worldlings cannot bear to appear with a stain on their countenance, before those whom they love, what wonder if souls that love God endeavor to purify themselves more and more, in order to render themselves more pleasing in the eyes of the Lord? But I do not require that those who practise frequent communion should confess every time they communicate. It is advisable for them, however, to go to confession at least once a week.

Bodily medicine, if very sparingly used, gives relief, it is true, while, if frequently applied, it restores or preserves



health ; thus, too, confession, if made even but seldom produces saving effects in the soul, while, if made frequently, it produces in the soul the fulness of perfection.

To this we may add another most important reflection : it is that confession, made frequently, is a most effectual means of disarming our ghostly enemy, and thus rendering him unable to injure us or hinder our spiritual progress. It is easy to account for this, since all the power which the enemy has over us comes from the sins that we commit. Now, if these sins be mortal, they put him in full possession of our souls ; if venial, they do not indeed give him entrance into our hearts, but they embolden him to attack us with greater violence. Hence, if we confess frequently and properly, our soul will be habitually free from sin, and thus the devil will be excluded from our hearts ; he will not have even the courage, or the power, to harm us ; so that we shall be free and unshackled in our pilgrimage towards heaven.

Cæsarius relates (*Mirac.*, lib. ii. c. xxxviii.) that a theologian of blameless life, being about to die, beheld the devil lurking in a corner of his room. The dying priest addressed the fiend in the words of St. Martin : " What art thou doing here, thou cruel beast ? " He, then, by virtue of his priestly power, commanded the devil to declare what it was that most baffled his efforts. Though thus adjured, the devil remained silent. The priest again commanded the demon, in the name of God, to answer him, and to answer the truth. The evil spirit thereupon replied : " There is nothing in the Church which does us so much harm, which so unnerves our power, as frequent confession."

## INDULGENCES.

**1. What is an Indulgence ?**

*An indulgence is the remission of the temporal punishment due to sin.*

In explaining the Catholic doctrine of satisfaction, we showed that, besides the eternal punishment due to sin, there is also a temporal punishment; that, for those who have sinned after baptism, this temporal punishment often remains to be expiated even after the sin itself has been remitted; that the extent of this punishment is in proportion to the heinousness of the crimes committed; that the penance enjoined in confession is usually much less than what is justly due to sin, and that, if God's justice be not fully satisfied in this life, he will require a much more rigorous punishment in purgatory; for "we must either do penance or burn."

Now, is there any means of obtaining a remission of this debt of temporal punishment? Yes, we may obtain a remission of the temporal punishment due to our sins by the application of the atoning merits of Christ. But how can his merits be applied to our souls? We have seen, above, that the merits of Christ are applied to our souls in the Sacrament of Penance; but that, even after confession, as we have said, we have still to satisfy God's justice by our own voluntary good works of penance. We have, however, another means of satisfying God's justice: that is, by *indulgences*.

In the words of the Catechism, an *indulgence* is "a remission of the temporal punishment which often remains due to sin after the sin itself has been remitted." An indulgence therefore is not, in any sense, a pardon of sin, either

past, present or future. It always presupposes that the guilt of sin has already been remitted.

## 2. What are we bound to believe concerning indulgences?

*These two articles of faith : 1, that God has given to his Church the power of granting indulgences ; 2, that the use of indulgences is salutary to the Christian.*

Concerning indulgences, the Church teaches these two articles of faith : 1. That she has received from Christ the power of granting them. 2. That the use of them is very salutary to the Christian people. (Conc. Trid. Sess. 25, Cap. 21.)

Christ said to Peter : "I will give to thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven ; and whatsoever thou shalt loose upon earth shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. xvi., 19.) And on another occasion he said to all his apostles : "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven ; and whatsoever you shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven." (Matt. xviii., 18.) This power of *binding* includes the power of refusing absolution, whenever it is deemed necessary, and also of imposing a penance to satisfy the divine justice. The power of *loosing* includes the power of absolving those who are truly penitent, as well from the guilt of sin and the eternal punishment due to it, as from the *temporal* punishment incurred by sin ; in a word, from every thing that can keep the soul from entering heaven. Such has always been the faith and practice of the Church, from the days of the apostles even to our own time. We have a striking example of the exercise of this power in the case of the incestuous Corinthian mentioned by St. Paul in his

epistle. This young man was guilty of a very heinous crime, and St. Paul imposed upon him a very severe penance. (1 Cor. v., 1-6.) But, some time after, moved by the prayers of the faithful, and the great contrition of the penitent, the apostle, in the name of Christ, released him from the penalty which he had imposed. "What I have pardoned, if I have pardoned anything, for your sakes, I have done it in the person of Christ." (2 Cor. ii., 10.) That is to say, if the sincere sorrow and the penitential exercises of the incestuous Corinthian, have left anything to expiate, I, in the person of Christ, have pardoned it, for your sakes.

We know that it was the practice of the primitive church to impose very long and severe penances. Public penances were imposed for public crimes, and private penances for secret sins.

There were four principal classes of public penitents. The first class were called *Weepers*. These were condemned to kneel at the church-door and to beg the prayers of the faithful, as they passed. (St. Greg. Thaum. Ep. Can; St. Basil. Ep. 2.) The second class were called *Hearers*. They were permitted to enter the church, and to listen to the catechetical and other instructions; but they were allowed no share in the public prayers of the Church. The third class were called *Prostrates*. They were allowed to assist at the public service, up to the Gospel; they were then excluded as unworthy to be present at the more solemn parts; but, before their departure, and whilst they lay *prostrate*, public prayers were offered for them. The last class were called *Assisters*: they were solemnly absolved from their sins, and were permitted to assist at the public prayers and the Holy Sacrifice, but were not allowed to com-



municate until they had remained the prescribed time in this last stage of their penitential course. (Con. Ancyran. can. 4; Con. Nicen. can. 12; St. Basil. Ep. ad Amph.) They were obliged to lead retired lives, to fast often, to say the prescribed prayers, and to give alms according to the nature of their sins, the degree of their sorrow, their means and their condition. (P. Morin. lib. 4, 5, 6; P. Martenne, Antiq. Eccl. Ritibus.)

Now, at the breaking out of a persecution, the Church granted indulgences to the more *fervent* of the penitents: that is, she shortened the duration of their penance, and admitted them to holy communion. Thus she exercised that power of *binding* and *loosing* which she received from Christ. The Church, then, has the power of granting indulgences.

*The use of indulgences is very salutary to the Christian people.* What can be more salutary than to go to confession, receive holy communion, and perform such good works, as prayer, fasting, alms-deeds, etc? Now, the performance of these works is encouraged especially by indulgences. These good works are generally prescribed by the Church when granting indulgences. Indeed, one great reason why thousands of Catholics approach the sacraments and perform so many other good works, is, precisely, that they may thereby gain an indulgence. Again, what can be more salutary for us than to cancel the debt of temporal punishment due to our sins? Undoubtedly this debt is an obstacle to the ultimate union of our soul with God. Our soul is strong and courageous in the practice of virtue, and in resisting every temptation, in proportion as it is united to God. It is from God that we draw the strength and courage necessary to remain faithful in his service. If

we are not intimately united with God, we will scarcely have sufficient strength and courage to practise virtue in certain trying circumstances, and to resist certain grievous temptations. By omitting such acts of virtue, we lose the grace and the reward attached to their performance; and by yielding to the temptation to grievous sin, we again forfeit God's grace, and render ourselves liable to eternal punishment. Now, all these evils, as we have said, flow from our want of intimate union with God; and this want of intimate union with God again proceeds from the debt of temporal punishment still remaining due to our sins. Hence, the Holy Ghost admonishes us "not to be without fear about sin forgiven." (Eccl. v., 5.) It is, therefore, of the greatest importance for us, even in this life, to cancel this debt as soon as possible, by every means in our power.

Now as this debt is remitted by gaining indulgences, it is evident, that the gaining of indulgences is most salutary for every Christian.

There are many who do not now understand how important is this intimate union of the soul with God, and how the debt of temporal punishment can be an obstacle to this perfect union; but they will understand it clearly, however, when suffering in the flames of purgatory.

No sooner has the soul departed this life, than it beholds God, face to face. From this sight of God it receives at once so deep and vivid a knowledge of God, and of all his infinite perfections, that it can think of nothing else. It feels so violently drawn towards God, that it can wish, seek and love nothing but him alone. It experiences at once an insatiable hunger and thirst after God; it pants for the Supreme Good with unutterable desire. "God! God! I must possess God!" is its constant cry. But the soul is

kept back from God by the debt of temporal punishment that remains still unpaid ; it must expiate in purgatory the sins which were not sufficiently canceled in this life. In this banishment from the sight of God, the soul finds the height of its torments. As it is the height of happiness to see God, so it is the greatest of all pains to be banished from his presence. It is true, during this life, the soul experiences but a feeble desire to see God. As it does not know the greatness of this heavenly benefit, it does not comprehend how great a pain and misfortune it is to be deprived of it. But when the soul has quitted the body, it conceives so high an esteem for the possession of the Supreme Good, it burns with so ardent a desire to obtain it, it tends with so much violence to enjoy it, that the greatest, the most excruciating of all its torments in purgatory is to be rejected, even for an instant, from the presence of its Creator. In a word, the soul suffers more from the privation of the beatific vision of God, than from all the other torments of purgatory. Such is the infinite beauty of God, that to behold him, even for a moment, and then to be rejected from his presence, is to experience the torment of hell. In heaven, love for God is the happiness of the elect ; but in purgatory, it is the source of the most excruciating pain. It is principally for this reason, that the souls in purgatory are called "poor souls," since they are, in the most dreadful state of poverty—that of the privation of the beatific vision of God.

After Anthony Corso, a Capuchin, a man of great piety and virtue, had departed this life, he appeared to one of his brethren in religion, and begged him to recommend him to the charitable prayers of the community, in order that he might receive some relief in his pains. "For I do

not know," said he, "how I can bear any longer the pain of being deprived of the sight of my God. I shall be the most unhappy of creatures as long as I remain in this state. Would to God that all men would understand well what it is to be deprived of the sight of God ; for then they would certainly be willing to suffer everything during their life on earth rather than to be deprived of the sight of God in purgatory." (Ann. P. P. Capuc. ad 1548.)

### 3. Who has the right to grant indulgences ?

*The Pope, who, as successor of St. Peter, has received from Christ the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The bishops also have power to grant partial indulgences.*

In explaining the Catholic doctrine of satisfaction, we remarked that every good work has two effects—one called merit, and the other, satisfaction. The merit of a good work is derived from the grace of God, by which it is performed, and from the promise which God has made to reward good works. Satisfaction is that which atones for past faults. The satisfactory part of a good work is derived from the labor which is undergone in its performance.

That part of a good work which is called merit, belongs exclusively to ourselves ; but that part of a good work which is called satisfaction, may be applied to others, or may help to enrich what is called the "Treasury of the Church." The works of supererogation performed by the saints, are certainly not lost. These works of supererogation are such meritorious works as are performed by the saints over and above what is strictly required of them to satisfy God's justice for their personal sins. It is from the accumulated stores of satisfactory merit, derived from the good works of the saints, of the Blessed Mother of God,



and above all, of Jesus Christ himself, that the "Treasure of the Church" is formed.

This rich treasure of graces and merits was left by Christ to his Church, with power to dispense it to the faithful. Now the Church dispenses this treasure by granting indulgences.

It may be asked, "Who have the power to grant indulgences?" I answer: The Pope and the bishops of the Catholic Church alone have this power. The Pope, as head of the Church, has power to grant indulgences to the entire Church, while bishops possess this power only for their respective dioceses. During the first ages, bishops had power to grant a plenary indulgence in their own dioceses. They exercised this power till the fourth Council of Lateran. In this Council the power of bishops to grant indulgences was limited. Since that time they have only power to grant a forty days' indulgence in all ordinary cases, and a hundred days' indulgence on the occasion of the consecration of a church, and forty days on the anniversary of such consecration. Although the Pope has the power to grant indulgences to the whole Church, yet it is a received principle that *Briefs* of indulgences are not to be put into execution in a diocese until they have been examined and recognized as authentic by the bishop. This rule was made by the Council of Trent in order to prevent abuses.

#### **4. What is generally required to gain an indulgence?**

*We must be in the state of grace, and perform the good works prescribed.*

To gain an indulgence, certain conditions are required.

1. The recipient must be a member of the Church: that is, he must be baptized and free from excommunication.
2. He must have the intention of gaining the indulgence.

However, it is not necessary that he should know what indulgences are attached to the prayers and good works which he performs. It is enough for him to make the general intention of gaining all the indulgences he can. It is commonly believed that an intention of this kind, made each morning, and not virtually recalled, will suffice to gain all the indulgences of the day.

3. He must be in the state of grace. An indulgence being the remission of the temporal punishment which remains after the guilt of sin has been remitted, necessarily presupposes a state of grace. Nay, to gain a plenary indulgence, he must be free from the guilt, not only of mortal, but even of venial sin. So long as there remains on the soul the least venial sin unforgiven, the temporal punishment due to that sin cannot be remitted, and consequently a full plenary indulgence cannot be gained.

4. It is also necessary to perform all the good works which are prescribed, in order to gain the indulgence. The good works which are usually prescribed, in order to gain a plenary indulgence are : a good confession, communion, prayer, fasting, and alms-deeds.

1. A "*good confession*," is necessary if we have the misfortune to be in the state of mortal sin, as a good confession is the ordinary means appointed by God to regain his grace. Even should a person be in the state of grace, confession is a necessary condition for gaining a plenary indulgence, as all bulls of indulgences, now-a-days, contain always a clause that indulgences can be obtained only by those who are truly contrite, and make a good confession.

A "good confession" is, therefore, enjoined ; and it is a necessary condition, in order to obtain a plenary indulgence. Hence, a person who is not conscious of any

mortal sin is, nevertheless, obliged to confess in order to obtain the indulgence, according to a decree of the Congregation of Indulgences, dated 1759. But, in this latter case, it is not necessary to receive absolution, as has been decided by the same Congregation, by a decree, dated December 15th, 1841.

Clement XIII., by a decree, dated December 9th, 1763, granted permission to all who are in the habit of confessing weekly, unless lawfully hindered, to gain, by that one weekly confession, the benefit of every indulgence that may happen in that week, unless such persons have the misfortune to fall into mortal sin. The decree, however, excepts indulgences granted during a jubilee, or on a similar occasion; confession, in these two cases, is necessary to gain the indulgence: *Nihil tamen innovanda circa indulgentiam jubilæi tam ordinarii, quam extraordinarii aliasque ad instar jubilæi concessas.*

By a decree of the Congregation of Indulgences, dated June 12, 1822, and approved by Pope Pius VII., confession made on any day of the seven preceding the feast, the indulgence of which we propose to gain, will suffice; another confession on the day of indulgence, or on the day before, is not required to gain that indulgence, provided we have not fallen into mortal sin, and that all the other necessary conditions be complied with. Moreover, not only is the indulgence of a particular feast gained by one who has confessed on the seventh or eighth day before the feast, but, by a recent decision of the same Congregation, given at Rome, on December 15th, 1841, all the indulgences are gained which occur within eight days, and for gaining which confession is prescribed. In a great many dioceses, in virtue of rescripts obtained from the Holy See, the faith-

ful, by confessing only twice in the month, can gain all the indulgences occurring during the month, except they fall into mortal sin within that time.

2. The second condition necessary for gaining a plenary indulgence—if we except the indulgences of the Stations of the Cross—is “a good communion.” The indulgence of any particular festival can be gained by receiving holy communion on the vigil, that is, the day before the feast, according to a decree of the Sacred Congregation, dated June, 22d, 1822. In virtue of the same confession and the same communion, we can gain, on the one day, all the plenary indulgences to which we are entitled, as members of different confraternities. If a plenary indulgence occurs on the day on which we receive Easter communion, we can gain it, as we can satisfy the paschal precept, and obtain a plenary indulgence on the same day.

3. Besides a good confession and communion, we must also perform the other good works prescribed by the Church when granting indulgences. As an indulgence is always granted only on certain conditions, these conditions must be exactly fulfilled, otherwise we cannot gain the indulgence. If, therefore, one, through ignorance or forgetfulness, omits any part of the works or prayers prescribed, he does not gain the indulgence.

Now, as to the good work of “prayer,” it is almost, in every case, prescribed in order to gain an indulgence. To pray according to the intention of the Pope, is to pray for the extirpation of heresies and schisms, for the propagation of the Catholic Church, for peace and concord among Christian princes, and for the necessities of the Church. Five *Paters* and five *Aves* are generally said for this purpose; but any other equivalent prayer, will



suffice—such as the Litany of the Blessed Virgin, the *Misere-re*, or a decade of the Rosary. If we are accustomed to say the Rosary, it will do to offer it, or a part of it, with the intention of gaining the indulgence.

“Fasting” is one of the other good works sometimes prescribed by the Church to gain an indulgence. It is what the Holy Scriptures, as well as the example of Christ and his saints, recommend to us. If we read the lives of the saints, we will find that they invariably mortified themselves by fasting. “Alms-deeds,” according to one’s abilities, is also, sometimes, prescribed, to gain an indulgence. When the quantity of alms is not determined, every one should give in proportion to his means. The quantity of alms given should be regulated by the rules of prudence. Should any one give less than he ought, he would not be thereby deprived of all the benefits of the indulgence, though he would gain a great deal more benefit by being liberal. “When the quantity of prayers and alms,” says St. Thomas, “is not determined precisely by him who grants the indulgence, then the greater quantity of alms, well given and of prayers well said, will entitle the performer of both to a proportionably greater share in the indulgence granted.”

All these good works, besides confession and communion, are promoted by indulgences. An indulgence, so far from being a pardon for sin, or a license to commit sin, or “a method of making poor wretches believe that wickedness here may become consistent with happiness hereafter,” (Bishop Porteus, Protestant,) “is most useful to Christian people,” on account of the many good results which flow from it. Christian people know full well, that the more good works they do, and the greater the fervor is with

which they perform them, the greater will be the remission of the *temporary punishment* due to their sins, and the more abundant will be the fruits which they will derive from indulgences.

Here it may be asked: Should all the good works prescribed by the Pope to gain an indulgence be done in the state of grace?

It is the commonly-received opinion among divines, that to gain an indulgence it is not necessary that every good and prescribed work be done in the state of grace; it is sufficient if the last of these good works be performed in the state of grace, for the indulgence is granted only when the prescribed works are performed. The reason of this is that these good works are not required as meritorious and satisfactory, but as conditions and dispositions to receive the indulgence.

Though it be not necessary that the prescribed works should be *all* performed in the state of grace, yet it is, doubtless, necessary that these works should be done with a penitential spirit, and without any affection for mortal sin. How can works, performed with an affection for mortal sin, release us from temporal punishment?

### 5. How many kinds of indulgences are there?

*Two: plenary indulgence, which is the remission of all temporal punishment; and partial indulgence, which is the remission of but a part of the temporal punishment.*

Some indulgences are called *plenary*, and others *partial*. By a plenary indulgence is meant the remission of the whole debt of temporal punishment due to our sins, and by a partial indulgence is meant the remission of a part of that debt. If, for example, he who has gained a plen-

ary indulgence were to die immediately after, he would go straight to heaven without passing through purgatory ; but if he gained only a partial indulgence he would have to expiate the rest of his debt in purgatory.

To gain a plenary indulgence, it is necessary not only to be in the state of grace and to perform the prescribed good works, but also to be free from every affection for even the least venial sin.

**6. What is meant by an indulgence of forty days or seven years ?**

*The remission of such a debt of temporal punishment as a person would discharge if he did penance for forty days or seven years, according to the ancient canons of the Church.*

To understand the precise meaning of these expressions, we must call to mind what we said above of the ancient canonical penances. According to the ancient canons or rules of the Church, as we stated above, very severe penances were inflicted on those who had committed very heinous public crimes. These penances lasted, in some instances, three, seven, or ten years—sometimes even during an entire lifetime ; but they were often curtailed on account of the good dispositions of the penitent, or at the intercession of the faithful, and especially of the martyrs. This remission of a part of the penance imposed by the Church, is, as we have said, an indulgence. When, therefore, we speak of an indulgence of forty days, or of seven years, we do not mean that the time of suffering in purgatory is lessened by that number of days or years ; we mean, merely, the remission of so much of the temporal punishment due to sin, as would have been canceled by a forty days, or seven years' canonical penance, according to the ancient discipline of the Church.

**7. Can indulgences be applied to the souls in purgatory ?**

*Yes ; when the Pope has declared that they can be so applied.*

All indulgences may be applied to the living, but some may also be applied to the souls in purgatory by way of suffrage. Till recently, there were many indulgences applicable only to the living ; but now nearly all are applicable also to the souls in purgatory. Pope Pius IX. extended this privilege to all the indulgences contained in the *Raccolta*, or collection of indulgenced prayers and devotions in common use. There is a difference between indulgences applied to the living and those applied to the dead.

The Church exercises direct authority over the faithful on earth, and when she absolves them from sin, or from the debt of punishment, the effect is infallible, provided the person so absolved is in proper dispositions. In this case, therefore, we are certain that the fruit of the indulgence will be applied as long as there is no obstacle, because Christ has promised the Church that “ whatever she shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.” (Matt. xvi., 19.)

It is an article of faith that the souls in purgatory are helped by our prayers ; but the Church does not exercise the same authority over the faithful departed that she exercises over those upon earth. She cannot, therefore, directly release the suffering souls by absolving them from the debt of punishment ; but she offers to God a satisfaction equivalent to that debt, and she begs him to accept it in their behalf. The indulgences thus offered will certainly not be lost ; and should God not see fit to accept them in behalf of the particular souls for whom they are



offered, they will certainly benefit others. Although God has not made a distinct promise to accept our suffrages for the particular soul for whom they are offered, we know that he will do so, unless there is some special reason to the contrary. However, if we are not absolutely certain that the fruit of the indulgence will be applied to the particular soul in purgatory for whom it is offered, nevertheless we are quite certain of the good dispositions of the souls in purgatory; we are certain that there is nothing in them to hinder the full effect of the indulgence.

A very pious nun died in the convent in which St. Mary Magdalene de Pazzi lived. Whilst her corpse lay exposed in the church, the saint lovingly looked upon it, and prayed fervently that the soul of her sister might soon enter eternal rest. Whilst she was thus rapt in prayer, the sister appeared to her, surrounded with great splendor, in the act of ascending to heaven. The saint, on seeing this, could not refrain from calling out to her: "Farewell, dear sister! When you meet your heavenly Spouse, remember us who are still sighing for him in this vale of tears!" At these words our Lord himself appeared to the saint, and revealed to her that this sister had entered heaven so soon, on account of the indulgences gained for her. (*Vita S. Magd. de Pazzi*, L. I. c. 39.)

Many plenary indulgences can be gained for the souls in purgatory, by making the Way of the Cross. This exercise is very profitable to the suffering souls. We read in the Life of Catherine Emmerich, a pious Augustinian nun, that the souls in purgatory often came to her during the night and requested her to rise and make the Stations of the Cross for their relief. It is also related in the life of the Venerable Mary of Antigua, that a deceased

sister of her convent appeared to her, and said: "Why do you not make the Way of the Cross for me?" The servant of the Lord was astonished at these words; but Jesus himself appeared to her and said: "The exercise of the Stations is of the greatest advantage to the souls in purgatory. I have permitted this soul to beg you to go around the Way of the Cross in behalf of the suffering souls. Your frequent performance of this exercise for the relief of these souls, has induced them to hold intercourse with you, and they shall be your intercessors and protectors. Tell your sisters to rejoice at the great treasures which they possess. Let them strive to heap up treasures for themselves in heaven.

**8. What awaits us in the next life if we neglect to satisfy the divine justice?**

*Great suffering in purgatory, without gaining any merit therefrom.*

We are debtors to the divine justice, and we have the choice between two modes of payment. We may make satisfaction here below, of our own accord, or we may wait till we are forced to satisfy God's justice in purgatory. To prefer the latter, would be unpardonable cruelty towards ourselves, and a great want of love for God. Such conduct would force God to punish us, and deprive us, for a long time, of the happiness of heaven. Such ingratitude to God would render us unworthy to receive, in purgatory, the benefit of the prayers and good works which our friends on earth might offer up for us. St. Paul says: "It is a horrible thing to fall into the hands of divine justice."

Turlot relates that a sick man, who was confined to bed and afflicted with many pains during an entire year, prayed

to God to put an end to his sufferings. God sent him an angel who told him to choose between three days in purgatory and another year of suffering. The sick man chose the three days in purgatory. After his death, he was again visited by the angel. He now complained that the angel had deceived him; that he was suffering, not for three days, but for several years. The angel said to him: "What! a day has scarcely passed; your body is not yet buried; and you say that you are suffering here for several years!" The deceased then besought the angel to bring him back to life, that he might suffer his former infirmities for another year. His prayer was heard; and after having returned to life, he encouraged all who came to visit him, to suffer with cheerfulness all the pains of the present life rather than be condemned to the sufferings of the next.

No one can be in a poorer and more pitiful condition than those who are buried in fire. Now this is the condition of the souls in purgatory. They are buried in a sea of fire. The smallest spark of this purgatorial fire causes more intense pain than all the fires of this world put together. In this fire they suffer more pain than if they had to endure all the ills that flesh is heir to—they suffer more than the most cruel torments undergone by malefactors, or invented by the most barbarous tyrants—they suffer more than all the tortures of the martyrs united. Could these poor souls exchange the fire of purgatory for the most terrible earthly fire, they would consider the latter an agreeable pleasure-garden; they would find a fifty years' stay in the hottest earthly fire more endurable than an hour's stay in the fire of purgatory. Our terrestrial fire was not created by God to torment man, but rather to benefit him; but the fire of purgatory was created by God

solely to be an instrument of his justice ; and hence it is so intense and penetrating that it is impossible for us to conceive even the faintest idea of it in this life.

In this fire the poor souls are utterly unable to help themselves. The sick man palsied, in every limb, and even the most destitute beggar, has yet a tongue to ask relief. They can, at least, implore heaven—it is never deaf to their prayers ; but the souls in purgatory are so poor that they cannot do even this. The cases, in which some of them have been permitted to appear to their friends and crave assistance, are but exceptions. To whom shall they have recourse ? Is it, perhaps, to the mercy of God ? “Alas !” they sigh, “As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so doth my soul pant after thee, O God ! When shall I come and appear before the face of God ? My tears have been my bread day and night, whilst it is said to me daily : Where is thy God.” (Ps. xli., 1.) “Lord, where are thy ancient mercies ?” (Ps. lxxxviii., 50.) “I cry to thee, and thou hearest me not ; I stand up, and thou dost not regard me. Thou art become cruel toward me.” (Job xxx., 20, 21.) But the Lord does not regard their tears, nor heed their cries ; his justice must be satisfied, even to the last farthing.

Shall the poor souls, perhaps, endeavor to acquire new merits, and thereby purify themselves more and more ? Ah ! they know that their time for meriting has passed. Their earthly pilgrimage is over, and that fatal night is come upon them, *in which no one can work*. (John ix., 4.) They know that by all their sufferings they can gain no new merit, no higher glory or happiness in heaven—they know that they are condemned through their own fault to this state of suffering : they see clearly how many



admonitions, exhortations, inspirations and divine lights they have rejected; how many prayers and opportunities to receive the sacraments they have neglected, often through mere caprice and indolence; they see their ingratitude towards God, and the deep wounds they have made in the sacred heart of Jesus. Their extreme sorrow for all this is an ever-gnawing worm—a heartrending torment, that gives them no rest. “O cruel comforts! O accursed ease!” they cry out, “it is on your account that we are deprived of the enjoyment of God, our only happiness for all eternity!”

Shall they perhaps console themselves with the thought that their sufferings will soon be over? But they are often entirely ignorant of the length of time their sufferings shall last. Hence it is, that they sigh day and night, that they weep constantly and cry unceasingly: “Woe to us, that our sojourn is prolonged!”

Shall these poor, helpless souls, seek relief from their fellow-sufferers? But these are utterly incapable of affording them the least relief. These poor souls lament, and sob, and shed torrents of tears, and stretch out their hands, imploring help and consolation. We are the only ones who can assist them in their sufferings. A religious of the order of St. Dominic, when about to depart this life, earnestly begged a priest to say Mass for him as soon as he had expired. The good religious had scarcely breathed his last when the priest went to say Mass for him with great fervor. He had hardly taken off the sacred vestments after Mass, when his deceased friend appeared to him and rebuked him severely for his cruelty in leaving him, as he said, “in the torments of purgatory for thirty years.” Astonished at this, the good priest exclaimed:

“What! thirty years! why, an hour ago you were still alive!” “Learn, then, from this,” said the deceased, “how excruciating are the pains of purgatory, since one hour therein appears like thirty years.” (Da Fusian. tom. iv.)

### 9. What is meant by a Jubilee?

*A jubilee is a plenary indulgence, which the Pope grants every twenty-five years, or upon extraordinary occasions.*

Besides the ordinary indulgences, there are others which are granted in the form of a jubilee. Among the ordinances which God commanded Moses to publish to the Jewish people, we read the following: “Thou shalt sanctify the fiftieth year, and shall proclaim remission to all the inhabitants of thy land: for it is the year of jubilee.” (Leviticus xxv., 10.) Every fiftieth year, therefore, was observed as a time of great rejoicing. The houses and lands which had been sold during the previous years, returned to their original owners; all debtors were released from their obligations, and slaves were set at liberty. In imitation of the jubilee of the Old Law, the Church, at fixed periods, dispenses to her children, with a more liberal hand, her spiritual treasures; and, to extend their benefit as widely as possible, she gives more ample powers to her priests in the tribunal of penance, and earnestly invites her children to make a good use of the great favors which she offers them. The indulgence of the jubilee, therefore, is a plenary indulgence, granted on some special occasion and attended with greater solemnity and more ample powers in the minister of the Sacrament of Penance; so that its fruit is more copious, more extended, and more certain than in ordinary indulgences.

Some writers maintain that the Christian jubilee was

first celebrated by the apostles themselves ; but we have no clear evidence in support of this opinion. Pope Boniface VIII. is frequently spoken of as the first who published a jubilee ; but it seems pretty certain that he only modified the form, and fixed the time of recurrence, of what had been previously established. The origin of this form of granting indulgences is involved in obscurity. Boniface VIII. fixed the time for the jubilee for every hundredth year. Clement VI., in the year 1350, shortened the period to every fiftieth year, in imitation of the Jewish jubilee. Urban IV. ordered the jubilee to be celebrated every thirty-three years, in honor of the thirty-three years of our Lord's life upon earth. Finally, Paul II., in the year 1470, fixed the time of the jubilee for every twenty-five years, in order to extend its benefits, as far as possible, to each generation of the faithful. This constitution was carried into effect in the year 1475, under the pontificate of Sixtus IV., and has continued in force ever since. (The jubilee of the holy year, as it is called, is first published in Rome, whither devout pilgrims flock from all parts of Christendom to visit the shrines of the apostles and to fulfil the conditions which are prescribed for gaining the indulgence of the jubilee. After the expiration of a twelvemonth, the jubilee is extended to the rest of the Christian world.) During the continuance of the jubilee other plenary indulgences granted for the benefit of the living are, as a rule, suspended ; but those granted for the dead or the dying remain in full force.

Besides these more solemn and fixed periods for the jubilee of the holy year, particular jubilees are published by the Pope to thank God for some signal benefit, or to implore his aid in some pressing necessity. Thus Pope Pius

IX. published a jubilee to thank God for the definition of the Immaculate Conception ; and Pope Gregory XVI. did the same, some years before, for the peace and welfare of the Church in Spain. It is also customary for the new Pope to publish a jubilee on the occasion of his accession to the Papal Chair. The conditions for gaining a jubilee vary, according to the good pleasure of the Pope. This we see in the case of the jubilee published in 1879, by Pope Leo XIII. It will be, therefore, unnecessary to mention these conditions here.

**10. What are the privileges of confessors, and of the faithful, during the time of a Jubilee ?**

1. *The Pope grants to all confessors a special power to absolve even in reserved cases, and from ecclesiastical censures, and to commute private vows into other works of piety.*

2. *The faithful are powerfully aided by divine grace in the work of their conversion and sanctification.*

The plenary indulgence of the jubilee does not grant a fuller remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, than any other plenary indulgence usually granted by the Church ; nevertheless, it has many advantages which other indulgences do not possess. There are special times of grace, of mercy, and forgiveness ; there are times when the Lord draws nearer to us ; there are seasons in which the flood-gates of heaven are opened, and the refreshing dew and the fertilizing showers of divine grace flow more abundantly upon us. God, who is present to us at all times, and is good and merciful at every moment of our life, becomes, at certain periods, more intimately present to us, and imparts to us such abundant and signal marks of his mercy and tenderness, as impel us more forcibly to



lead better and holier lives. Such, assuredly, is the time of a jubilee. It is truly an acceptable time; it is indeed a time of salvation.

The announcement of a jubilee is, indeed, the good tidings of salvation, of conversion, and sanctification to the Christian people—of salvation to all; of conversion to sinners; of amendment to the lukewarm, and of greater sanctification to the just.

During the jubilee extraordinary powers are granted to all approved confessors. The following are usually granted on such occasions :

Every one is permitted to choose any confessor approved in the diocese where he lives.

Every approved confessor is empowered to absolve from all reserved cases as well as from all censures.

Every approved confessor has power to change certain kinds of vows into other good works, nearly equivalent to the obligations of the vow; but he must necessarily impose some good works nearly equivalent, otherwise he would grant a dispensation, and not a commutation. This commutation of vows, however, should not be made capriciously, but always for sufficient and well-founded reasons. When these reasons occur, and a change of vows is judged necessary, then any obligation that was made perpetual by the vow should be changed into some other perpetual obligation, but more convenient and less painful than the vow. Obligations that are personal should be changed into other personal obligations; and obligations that are real, into other real obligations. The vow of perpetual chastity, and that of entering into religion, are always excepted, and are always reserved to the Pope. A confessor can make use of his privileges only in the confessional,

and in favor only of those who seriously intend to profit by the jubilee to its full extent. If the penitent is not able to perform all the good works prescribed by the Bull, the confessor can, in that case, change these works into other good works which the penitent can perform.

Though communion, for all who can communicate, is necessary in order to gain the jubilee, yet children under age, who have not yet made their first communion, may gain the jubilee without receiving, provided they perform all the other works prescribed.

Moreover, since the indulgence of the jubilee is more universal, since all the Catholics in the world unite in doing penance, the God of mercy is moved thereby to bestow greater favors on his people.

Finally, the penitential and satisfactory works prescribed are greater than the works and prayers usually prescribed in times of other plenary indulgences, and consequently, we can gain more profit from such works than we can from the satisfactory works prescribed to gain other indulgences.

### 11. What are reserved cases ?

*Special mortal sins, the absolution from which the Pope or the bishop reserves to himself, in order to render these sins less frequent, by making absolution more difficult.*

Christ gave power to his Church, as we have seen, to absolve from all sins. This power is vested in the Head of the Church. The Holy Father, if he chooses, can communicate this fulness of power to every bishop and priest ; or he may grant it to a few only ; or he may specify certain sins, the absolution from which he reserves to himself. Hence, should a person commit any of those sins specified

by the Pope, he can be absolved only by the Pope himself, or by a bishop or priest empowered by the Pope.

A bishop can, in like manner, limit the jurisdiction of the priests of his diocese. Now such mortal sins, the absolution from which the Pope or bishop reserves to himself, are called "reserved cases." The reason why ecclesiastical superiors reserve certain sins, is: 1, to render these sins less frequent by making absolution more difficult; 2, to make the cure more certain by forcing the sinner to have recourse to an extraordinary confessor—for extraordinary diseases require the aid of an extraordinary physician. (Concil. Trid. Sess. 14, c. 7.)

## 12. What are censures?

*Certain punishments by which the Church deprives Christians of many spiritual benefits for public and scandalous crimes.*

Every civil government has the power and the right to use the means necessary to maintain good order and to promote the temporal welfare of its subjects. One of these means consists in punishing those who transgress its laws and disturb the peace of society. Now the Catholic Church is a real government, and has received from Christ full power and authority to use every just and lawful means to promote the spiritual welfare of her children, and to punish *those of her members* who, either by false principles and erroneous doctrines, or by scandalous conduct, cause the ruin of souls. Christ gave this power to his Church when he said: "Whatsoever you shall bind upon earth, shall be bound also in heaven." (Matt. xviii., 18.)

The Pope can use this power for the welfare of the entire Church, and the bishops can use it within the limits

of their respective dioceses. Those also can use this extraordinary power who have received it, by special commission, from the Pope or bishop.

In virtue of this power, ecclesiastical superiors can inflict censures or punishments on all Christians who are guilty of certain public and scandalous crimes, and thereby deprive them of many spiritual benefits enjoyed by the rest of the faithful.

When, however, the sinner is proud and obstinate, the Church generally prefers to have recourse to God by prayers and tears, and to reprove the guilty one in the spirit of mildness and charity, rather than take the sword of justice and cut off the sinner in his crimes. She has received this power, not unto destruction, but unto edification. She uses her right with great discretion, and often relaxes the severity of her discipline according to the example of the husbandman in the Gospel: "And the servants said to him: Wilt thou that we go and gather up the cockle? And the husbandman said: No, lest perhaps in gathering up the cockle, you root up also the wheat with it." (Matt. xiii., 28.) The Church employs her censures only as the last resort, only when all other remedies have failed.

When St. Thomas of Villanova arrived at Valencia, a city of his diocese, he learned that many of the inhabitants led very disorderly lives. At first he severely rebuked them in his sermons, and endeavored, by every means in his power, to reform them. But not seeing the amendment he wished, he threatened them from the pulpit, and told them publicly that, if they did not amend, he would proceed against them with the utmost severity, and would have recourse to the censures of the Church. Some time after he caused a decree to be promulgated, in which



he explained the nature of the punishments which he was about to inflict upon the guilty. This decree caused much dismay and excitement throughout the city, and induced several of the principal inhabitants to go to the archbishop, and beseech him not to proceed to extremities. They endeavored to persuade him, that, though his intention was praiseworthy, yet such severe measures would do much evil and very little good. He replied, that, since neither his entreaties nor his threats were of any avail, he was resolved to employ more powerful weapons. He added that, if any evil befel those who remained obstinate, it would be their own fault, not his; that in this affair he acted from a sense of duty, his object being to produce a reformation, cost what it might. He wished also to show to all, that he was not a man to connive at the vices of his flock; that he was not to be deterred by servile fear; that, on the contrary, he was determined to do all in his power to punish the guilty, and put a stop to their scandalous conduct. The saint showed so much firmness, on this occasion, that the offenders were at last terrified; the greater part of them returned to their duty and gave up their sinful company.

It must be observed that all censures are not incurred in the same manner. Some are imposed by law, and others by a judge. Censures imposed by law are such as are incurred by transgressing a known commandment. So long as the law is known and in force, censure is incurred the moment the forbidden act is committed.

Censure inflicted by a judge or ecclesiastical superior is imposed in punishment of some sin, and for the correction of the guilty.

Some censures are incurred the moment the act is com-

mitted (*ipso facto*) ; others are not incurred until the act is proved and the sentence pronounced (*sententia ferenda*). There are certain censures which are called "reserved." Those who have incurred such censures, can be absolved from them only by the ecclesiastical superior. Censures not reserved are those from which any approved confessor can absolve. In the hour of death every priest has power to absolve from every reserved case and censure. If, however, the penitent recovers, he must present himself to his ecclesiastical superior and submit to his directions.

Should a person be invalidly and unjustly censured, such censure is null in the sight of God. It is, however, better to submit, unless the censure is *evidently null*, until appeal is made to a higher authority. He who, under pretext of appeal, violates the censure, deserves a new and more severe censure ; and if such a person is an ecclesiastic, he becomes thereby irregular.

### 13. How many kinds of censures are there ?

*Three ; excommunication, suspension, and interdict.*

The Church has three great punishments which she sometimes inflicts on those who are guilty of great public crimes and scandals. These punishments are excommunication, suspension, and interdict. The punishment of excommunication consists in depriving one or more of the faithful of the rights, privileges, and advantages of the Church. There are two kinds of excommunication—*major* and *minor*. By major excommunication the offender is deprived of all right to the goods of the Church ; he is entirely cut off from the body of the Church, and debarred from her sacraments ; he has no share in the prayers or good works of the faithful ; he loses the right of burial in

consecrated ground ; he can neither receive nor administer the sacraments ; he cannot exercise any spiritual jurisdiction ; and he can neither confer nor receive a benefice.

The Church may inflict major excommunication without expressly naming the guilty parties. Thus, for instance, did Pope Pius IX. inflict major excommunication upon all those who took part in the spoliation of the Ecclesiastical States. Now if any one, thus excommunicated, violates the censure, he sins, even though he is not denounced by name. He who is excommunicated has no share in the public prayers of the Church. The faithful, however, may pray for him privately. He cannot assist at Mass or the divine office. If found there, he is to be expelled. If he resists, divine service must be discontinued. He may, however, be present at sermons, catechetical instructions and the like. He can neither administer nor receive the sacraments. Whoever knowingly administers the sacraments to him falls thereby under interdict. He who is under major excommunication, cannot be buried in consecrated ground. He can have no voice, either active or passive, in elections or presentations to ecclesiastical benefices or dignities ; and, if he is a collator, he is deprived of his right, as long as the excommunication is in force. If he has spiritual jurisdiction, he cannot exercise it, nor is he allowed to defend himself before the ecclesiastical judges. Hence, the practice of absolving from excommunication *ad cautelam*, that is, in order that he may be permitted to defend himself. The faithful can have no intercourse with an excommunicated person either by word or letter. They can neither salute him, nor pray with him, nor dwell with him, nor do business with him, nor work, nor associate, nor eat with him.

It is, however, allowed to speak to him, for his spiritual good, that he may be converted and do penance.

Married persons, who are excommunicated should act towards each other as they did before incurring censure; but neither should do anything to encourage the other in his crimes. Children should obey their excommunicated parents, and servants their masters, but without encouraging them in the crime for which they are excommunicated. Of course, he who unwillingly holds intercourse with an excommunicated person, neither commits sin nor incurs censure.

Necessity will also excuse us from sin and censure. We may, for instance, prosecute an excommunicated person for what he owes us. Physicians, surgeons, etc., may attend him, but should speak to him only when necessary. Whoever holds intercourse with an excommunicated and denounced person, except in the above cases, incurs *minor* excommunication; and if such a person is, moreover, a partaker in the crime for which excommunication has been pronounced, he incurs *major* excommunication. By partaker in the crime, is meant an accomplice, a counsellor, an aider or abettor. *Minor* excommunication deprives a person only of some of the spiritual goods of the Church. It deprives him of the right to receive the sacraments, and to be elected or presented to any kind of ecclesiastical dignity. But no one is obliged to avoid the company of one who is under minor excommunication. Whenever the Church or ecclesiastical law forbids anything under pain of excommunication, without specifying any particular kind, it is always understood to mean major excommunication.

*Suspension* is a punishment of the Church, which de-



prives an ecclesiastic of the right to perform the offices of his order, or of his benefice, or to receive the fruits of his benefice. When the sentence of suspension is couched in general terms without any restriction, it is to be considered general, and deprives the delinquent of all the above rights. An ecclesiastic may be suspended from one part of his office, and not from another. A canon may be forbidden the choir, and yet be left free to discharge his other duties. A priest may be suspended from his priestly functions, and yet be allowed to perform the duties of deacon. The reverse, however, is never permitted. He who is suspended from the exercise of the inferior order is never allowed to exercise the superior. He who exercises an office from which he is suspended, falls into *irregularity*, and becomes disqualified for any benefice or ecclesiastical function. He remains in this inhabile state until the period of suspension has expired, or until it is removed by the ecclesiastical superior.

There is, however, a difference between *suspension* and *deposition*. He who is suspended retains his office, his benefice, his rank. He who is deposed, however, loses all these. Deposition, if absolute, deprives an ecclesiastic *forever* both of office and benefice. The effect of *deposition* is nearly the same as that of *degradation*. The only difference is, that deposition is effected without any ceremony by the mere sentence of an ecclesiastical judge, whilst great solemnity accompanies degradation. Degradation takes place when the criminal is to be delivered over to the secular arm to be punished for his crimes.

Interdict is a censure of the Church, which forbids, in punishment of notable and scandalous disobedience, the public reception of the sacraments, the divine office, and the

ecclesiastical sepulture. An interdict may be either *local* or *personal*, or *mixed*. It may also be *general* or *special*. A local interdict is that which falls upon a particular place, as when it is forbidden to celebrate the divine office in a particular church, or to bury in a particular cemetery. A personal interdict falls upon particular persons.

It forbids such persons to enter a church or to be interred in consecrated ground. The only exception to the latter is the case of interdicted ecclesiastics, who, if they have observed the interdict, may be buried in consecrated ground but without ceremony or solemnity.

A mixed interdict is that which is both local and personal. A general interdict falls upon the whole place and all its inhabitants. A special interdict falls only on particular churches or cemeteries, or on particular persons.

If a church is interdicted, the graveyard contiguous to it is also interdicted. This is not the case, however, if the graveyard is at a distance, unless specially mentioned.

During the time of an interdict, the Church allows baptism, confirmation, penance, the viaticum, and extreme unction, to those who are not excommunicated and denounced, and who are not interdicted by name. During the interdict, however, all the sacraments should be administered without solemnity, and before only the necessary witnesses. The Church permits the divine office to be celebrated, but *not sung*; and this must be done without sound of bell, and with closed doors. The divine office, however, is not permitted when the church is profaned, and consequently interdicted. During the time of a general interdict, it is permitted to have solemn public service on Easter, Pentecost, Christmas, Corpus Christi, and the feast of the Assumption.

Ecclesiastics who violate the interdict by admitting denounced persons to the sacraments, fall themselves under the interdict ; and laics who have been the cause of the interdict, and who violate it, subject themselves to the penalty of major excommunication.

An interdict can be removed only by the ecclesiastical superior.

A conditional interdict ceases only when the scandal that provoked it has ceased, and when the required reparation has been made.

The greatest of all these punishments is major excommunication. The fear of this punishment, or the necessity of obtaining its remission, has, especially in the ages of faith, prevented and remedied many great evils, such as wars, exactions, defections, scandals, and the like. How many kings have been brought back to moderation and justice ; how many ecclesiastics have been brought to the observance of the holy canons ; how many crimes against the sanctity of marriage have been prevented ; how many scandals abolished ; how many hostile nations reconciled ; how many rebellious subjects brought to obedience, by the fear of excommunication !

There was a time when excommunication had its terrors, greater than even the terrors of death. The culprit on whom the sentence of excommunication had been passed, was regarded with horror and detestation by the entire civilized world. In our godless age, however, there are many who disregard the censures of the Church.

It is true, we do not always see excommunicated persons visited in this life by temporal punishments. The effect of excommunication is not to cause sickness or other temporal misfortunes, but to cut off those who are guilty, from

the communion of the Church, and to class them with heathens and publicans. Such, too, they will remain in the sight of God forever, if they do not repent and are not reconciled to the Church. History, however, records several instances of such divine chastisements. We need not go back to the days of the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Napoleon Bonaparte made light of the Bull of excommunication of Pius VII. Yet though he tried to hide his anxiety, he could find no rest day or night. He ordered one of his ministers to draw up a list of all the excommunications which had been pronounced from the earliest days against monarchs. Deceived by the apparent indifference of the emperor, the minister took no notice of the matter. Napoleon, however, insisted, and the list was finally presented to him by M. de Champagny. There were eighty-five cases. The first was the excommunication pronounced by St. Athanasius against the governor of Libya, in 398. The last excommunication, which was on June 10th, 1809, was, by courtesy, omitted. Of these eighty-five, every one had visibly taken effect in one way or other. Napoleon, however, did not repent. He said, as cardinal Pacca relates in his Memoirs, that the Pope's excommunication could not make the muskets drop from the hands of his soldiers. Three years after the promulgation of the Bull, he went to Russia, and the intense cold actually caused the muskets to drop from the hands of his soldiers. This was the beginning of his downfall.

The Church uses this severe punishment as a salutary remedy to induce those who are excommunicated and denounced, to enter into themselves and to do penance for their crimes. Such unfortunate persons should, therefore, do penance without delay, repair the scandal which they



have given, and humbly submit to the orders of their ecclesiastical superiors, that they may obtain the grace of absolution from their sin, and be restored to the communion of the Church.

William, the famous duke of Aquitaine, was a man of extraordinary strength. He ate as much as eight men. He was brought up in luxury, and left entirely to himself. His delight was to quarrel and to fight. He often picked a quarrel merely to have the pleasure of fighting. He was very lustful. He kept his brother's wife forcibly for three years. He could not brook the least offence, and never forgave an injury. He had a heart of stone. He upheld a the scandalous schism against the lawful Pope, and persecuted the faithful bishops. He was at last excommunicated by Pope Innocent II.

St. Bernard heard of the scandalous life of this duke. He prayed for him, and exhorted him again and again to lead a peaceable and virtuous life; but in vain. One day St. Bernard was saying Mass; William stood at the Church-door with his retainers. St. Bernard prayed with tears. After consecration, he placed the sacred host upon the paten and bore it to the Church-door. Then, holding the sacred body of Jesus Christ in his hand, he spoke so earnestly and so forcibly to William, that he fell to the ground and there solemnly swore that he would do whatever the saint commanded him.

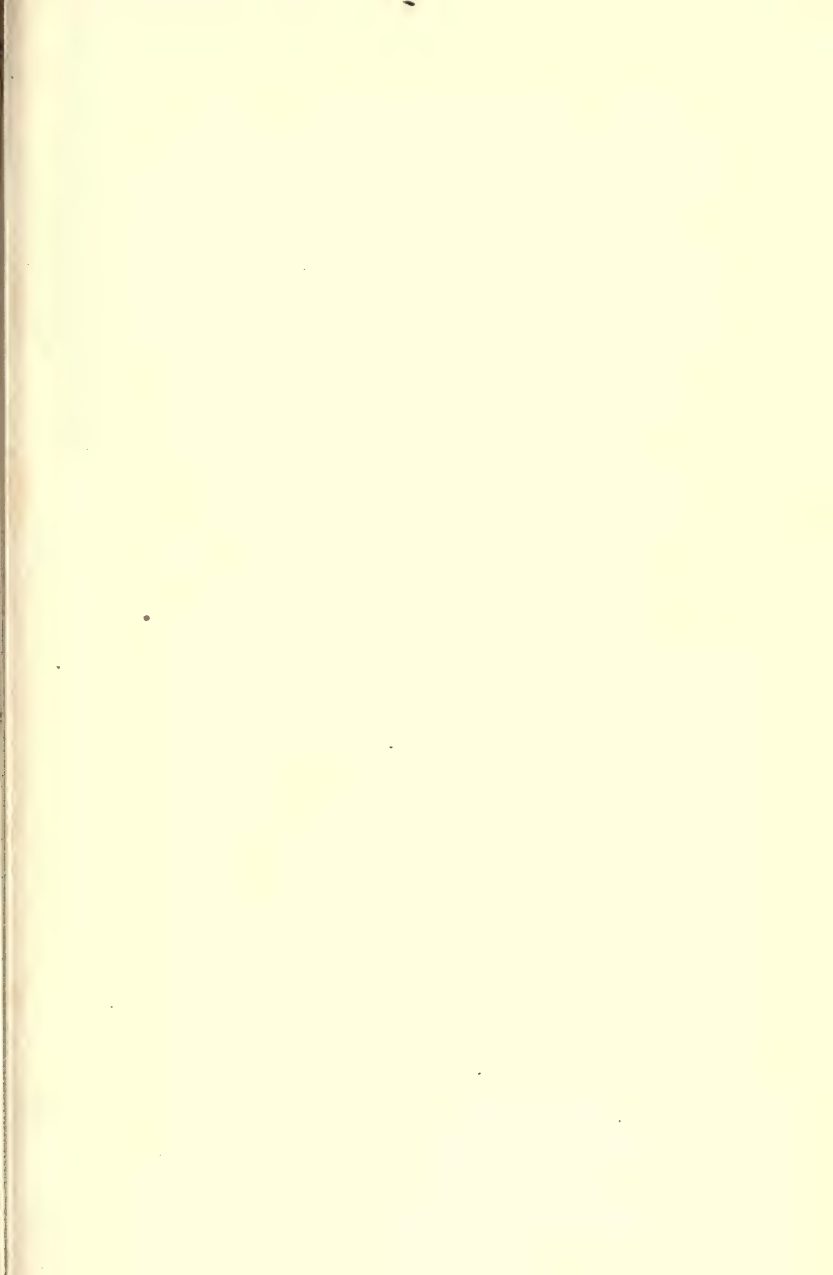
William arose an altered man; God's grace had touched his hard heart. He was now resolved to do penance for his sins. He went to a pious solitary. The hermit, knowing all the scandals that the duke had given, treated him harshly, upbraided him, and told him to do penance. "But, Father," answered William, "I wish to do penance; I have

come to you for this very purpose." The hermit, however, would not believe him, and turned him away. William bore this harsh treatment patiently. He went to another hermit, who received him kindly, encouraged him, and told him to go home and return with his armor and his best steed. William rode back fully equipped, as if going to battle. The hermit spoke to him in forcible language of the sinful life he had led. "Now," said he, "if you are truly repentant, you must perform the penance I impose on you. First, you must punish your body with fasting, and purify your soul by prayer. Secondly, sell all you have and give the proceeds to the poor. Thirdly, I oblige you to wear an iron armor during your whole life. As you have so grievously scandalized the Church, you must go bare-footed to the Pope, and entreat him to withdraw the excommunication pronounced against you."

William humbly accepted the penance. A blacksmith was sent for and he instantly riveted the iron coat of mail on the body of the penitent duke. William now gave all his possessions to the poor, and went bare-footed to the Pope. Eugene III., who then reigned, was at the time in council, at Rheims. Arrived at Rheims, William cast himself at the Pope's feet, and begged his Holiness to forgive him, and restore him to the communion of the faithful. The Pope was amazed at the strange garb and appearance of this huge giant. Hearing that it was William, Duke of Aquitaine, he could scarcely believe it. At last, he told William to go away; he could not believe that his repentance was sincere. The duke conjured his Holiness with tears to have mercy on him. "I know," said he, "that I have deserved to be driven away on account of my sins; but remember, most Holy Father, that if I do not obtain

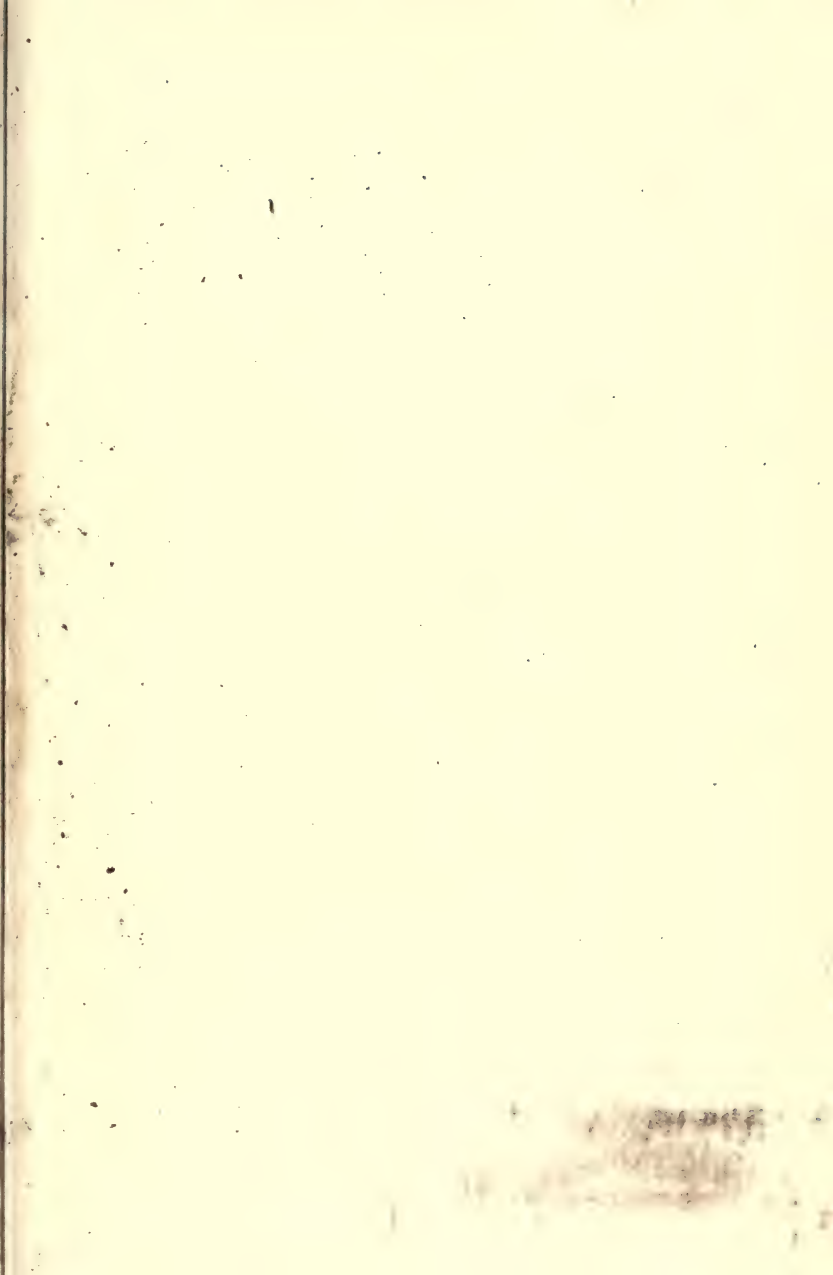
pardon, if my soul is lost, then I declare to you that God will hold you responsible for it, because you spurn the prodigal son who returns to you with a contrite heart."

The Pope was touched, and told him to go to the Patriarch of Jerusalem, whom he empowered to absolve him. William humbly obeyed and went to Jerusalem. The Patriarch received him with great kindness and wished to keep him in his own house; but William begged to be allowed to spend his days in some cave as a hermit. He led a life of rigorous penance for nine long years. His relations came after him to Jerusalem and entreated him to return home; but William refused. After they had gone, however, the thought of home gave him no rest. He struggled long against this temptation, but at last yielded, and turned towards his home. Passing through the town of Lucca, in Italy, he found the people at war with a neighboring city. His old love for fighting revived, and he became their leader. But suddenly God struck him with blindness. William repented and prayed God to forgive him. His sight was restored. He returned to Jerusalem. He was again tempted by his relatives, but he remained steadfast. The devils tempted him and beat him unmercifully. Even his companions in the desert persecuted him cruelly. But he bore all patiently to atone for his sins and satisfy God's justice. At last he became so virtuous that serpents and wild beasts did him no harm: even the little birds fluttered round him, perched on his shoulders, and sang sweetly in his ear the praises of the Creator. He is now venerated as a saint.

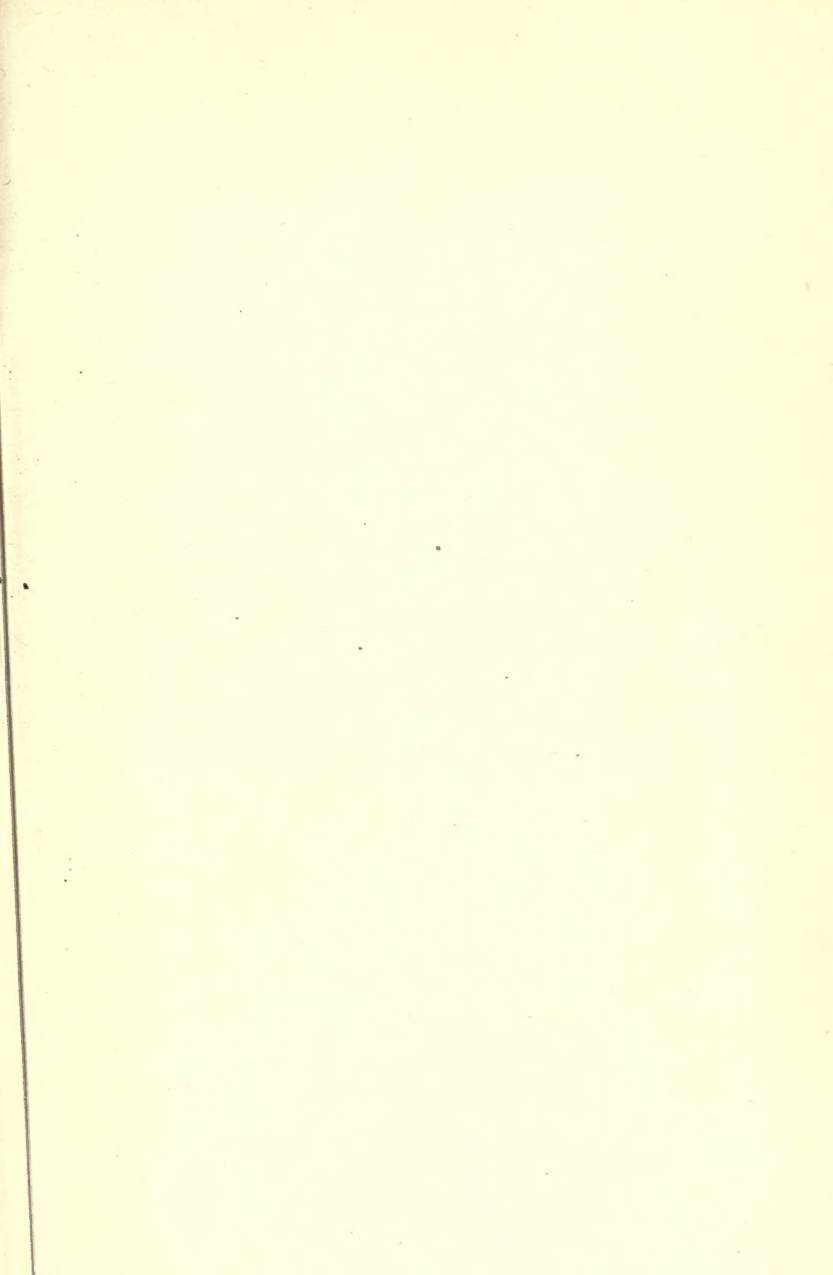




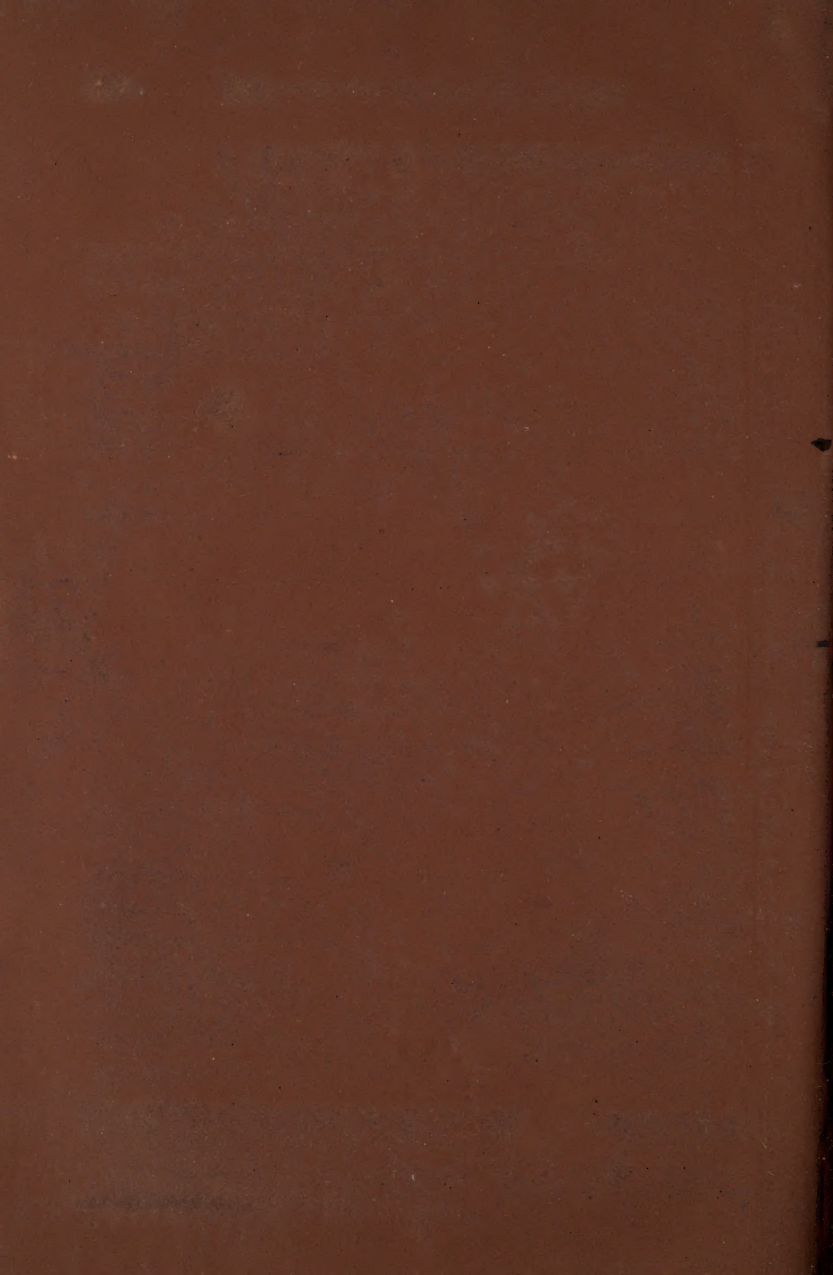












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